

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY



105 118

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY

---

## Keep Your Card in This Pocket

---

Books will be issued only on presentation of proper library cards.

Unless labeled otherwise, books may be retained for four weeks. Borrowers finding books marked, defaced or mutilated are expected to report same at library desk; otherwise the last borrower will be held responsible for all imperfections discovered.

The card holder is responsible for all books drawn on this card.

Penalty for over-due books 2c a day plus cost of notices.

Lost cards and change of residence must be reported promptly.



**Public Library**  
**Kansas City, Mo.**

---

## Keep Your Card in This Pocket

---

BERKOWITZ ENVELOPE CO., K. C., MO.

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI



Books by Emil Ludwig

BISMARCK

ON MEDITERRANEAN SHORES

LINCOLN

SCHLIEMANN

GIFTS OF LIFE

TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI



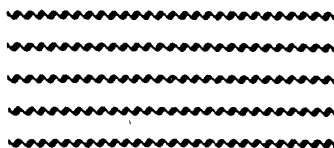




B. Mussolini a Emil Ludwig  
in ricordo del colloquio al Palazzo Venezia  
nel marzo — aprile 1932 — Anno X

*B. Mussolini to Emil Ludwig  
in memory of the conversations at the Palazzo Venezia  
during March and April, 1932 — Anno X*

# TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI



BY EMIL  
LUDWIG

*Translated from the German by*  
EDEN *and* CEDAR PAUL

W I T H I L L U S T R A T I O N S



LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY  
BOSTON 1933

MUSSOLINIS GESPRÄCHE MIT EMIL LUDWIG

*First published in Germany in 1932*

*Copyright, 1932,*

BY PAUL ZSOLNAY VERLAG, A. G. BERLIN, WIEN, LEIPZIG

*Copyright, 1933,*

BY LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY



*All rights reserved*

Published January, 1933

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*To act is easy, but to think is difficult; and  
to guide our actions by thought is irksome.*

WILHELM MEISTER



## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
--------------	---

### PART ONE

#### *The Training of a Ruler*

THE SCHOOL OF POVERTY	35
THE SCHOOL OF THE SOLDIER AND THE JOURNALIST	41
THE SCHOOL OF HISTORY	51

### PART TWO

#### *Metamorphoses*

SOCIALISM AND NATIONALISM	65
CAUSES OF THE WAR	77
ON THE ROAD TO POWER	87

### PART THREE

#### *The Problems of Power*

THE MANAGEMENT OF MEN	99
INFLUENCING THE MASSES	115
THE DANGERS OF DICTATORSHIP	129

# CONTENTS

## PART FOUR

### *The Regions of Power*

EUROPE	141
FOREIGN LANDS	149
HOME DEVELOPMENT	165
ROME AND THE CHURCH	175

## PART FIVE

### *Genius and Character*

ACTION AND REFLECTION	185
PRIDE AND ACTION	199
ART	211
LONELINESS AND DESTINY	221



# INTRODUCTION





## INTRODUCTION

### DOCUMENTATION

THE following conversations took place in the Palazzo di Venezia at Rome, being held almost daily for an hour at a time between March 23 and April 4, 1932, both dates inclusive. We talked Italian and each conversation was recorded by me in German as soon as it was finished. Only a few sentences from earlier conversations have been introduced into this book. The German manuscript was submitted to Mussolini, who checked the passages in which his own utterances were recorded.

No material other than the before-mentioned has been incorporated, but I have to acknowledge my indebtedness to Margherita Sarfatti for a good many hints conveyed to me in her biography. I have made no use of the numberless anecdotes current in Rome; and I have ignored the reports of Mussolini's collaborators, informative though these are. In a word, the talks consist of what actually passed in conversation between Mussolini and myself.

# TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

## CONCERNING POLITICAL PARTIES

Mistrust of the Dictator had been active in me for five years. Many of my Italian friends were hostile to his régime. Whenever I visited Italy I noted the omnipresence of uniforms, flags, and emblems whose sun was setting in Germany, though when I looked eastward they seemed to be dawning once again with terrific speed.

Three circumstances combined to modify my outlook. First of all, the foundations of "democracy" and "parliamentarism" are crumbling. Intermediate types are manifesting themselves; the traditional forms of political life have been undermined; there is a scarcity of men of mark. Secondly, both in Moscow and in Rome, I perceived that very remarkable things were being achieved upon the material plane, with the result that I came to recognise the constructive side of these two dictatorships. In the third place, psychological considerations led me to assume that the Roman statesman, notwithstanding the bellicose tenor of many of his speeches, was probably far from inclined to cherish plans of war.

But my own observations of Mussolini's personality had an even stronger effect upon my mind than

## INTRODUCTION

the foregoing considerations. As soon as I had been led (so I believed) to recognise in him certain traits which reminded me of Nietzsche's teachings, the man seemed to become detached from his movement and I began to regard him as a phenomenon apart, as is my custom with men who play a part in history.

The smile of practical politicians disturbs me as little as the animus of partisans in my own immediate circle. To me a man's most insignificant character trait is more important than the longest of his speeches; and when I am forming a judgment concerning an omnipotent statesman, every such trait assists me to forecast his actions. Politics of the day and party programs, the two forms in which unimaginative men contemplate the present, are of little interest to me. I have never belonged to any political party, and the only such party of which I could become a member would be an anti-war party, if such a party existed. The events of the last decade have convinced me that no system is absolutely the best, but that different nations at different times need different systems of government. Since I am before all an individualist, I could never have become a Fascist; and yet I do not fail to recognise that the Fascist movement has done great things for Italy. Transplanted to Germany, on the other

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

hand, I think Fascism would be likely to prove disastrous, for reasons that will be touched upon in Part Four of these conversations. Besides, on the German stage there is no star performer competent to play the part of Fascist leader.

It was easier for me to be an unbiased observer of Italian affairs because I was a foreigner. Had I been a French writer in the days of Napoleon, I should probably have stood aloof like Chateaubriand, whereas in those days as a German I should, like Goethe, have been filled with admiration for the Emperor. In like manner, Mussolini's figure impresses and attracts me, independently of party considerations, and regardless of the conflicting facts that, while declaring himself an opponent of the Treaty of Versailles he has Italianised southern Tyrol. The German Fascists find themselves in a dilemma when contemplating these inconsistencies; but my withers are unwrung, for I am content with the artistic observation of a remarkable personality.

### OUR FIRST MEETING

It became plain to me at our first encounter that Mussolini's personality was an extremely remarkable one. In the spring of 1929, I made advances to him at the time when Italian capitalists began to

## INTRODUCTION

regard him with disfavour and when his foreign policy became less provocative than before. During March of that year I had two conversations with him and subsequently I saw him again. On each occasion I was forearmed and turned the discussion towards the two questions concerning which we were decisively at odds, namely liberty and Fascism. In these interviews there speedily became manifest the cleavage between Fascist orthodoxy and the views of the founder of the faith — a cleavage which is characteristic of every great movement. Furthermore, I was strengthened in the conviction derived from previous experiences that in historical analysis more stress must be laid on the spoken word than on the written. In conversation a man discloses himself more freely than on paper with a pen, especially when he is as little inclined to pose as Mussolini — for in this respect the photographers ought to have uneasy consciences because they have sent forth a caricature into the world.

Already in these first interviews, I was less concerned to discover what Italy thought of its leader and what the leader's attitude was towards the Italians than to ascertain what Europe had to expect from Mussolini, who is wholly irresponsible, and therefore the most powerful man living in the world

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

to-day. Was he going to be a source of unrest or predominantly a constructive factor? He had been a disciple of Nietzsche, had been an anarchist and a revolutionist. Would his demon continue to impel him along the path he had entered in youth? On the other hand, having risen to power, would it be his main object to consolidate that power for personal ends? Was he likely to spiritualise Nietzsche's doctrines or to use them as a means for self-inflation?

Out of these conversations upon the science and art of government originated a design to elaborate them systematically, to develop methodically what had been primarily a free interchange of ideas. The balloon drifting hither and thither at the mercy of the winds was to become an airplane steering a definite course. At the same time, its flight was to be lofty and unconstrained. No secretary was present to take notes; no demand was made for the revision of a manuscript report; it was all a matter of personal confidence.

### SETTING OF THE CONVERSATIONS

The Palazzo di Venezia is in the great square (Piazza di Venezia) in the middle of Rome, at the foot of the Capitoline Hill. Built of yellowish-brown stone, resembling a medieval fortress with a



## INTRODUCTION

squat tower, the massive structure stands to the right of a huge modern monument in white marble, which is out of keeping with its surroundings and will need a century or more to acquire an incrustation which will make it tolerably harmonious. The palace, five centuries old, has passed through many hands. Built by the popes, in the seventeenth century it was ceded to the republic of Venice, from which in due course it was taken over by the imperial house of Austria. A hundred years later, in 1915, the kingdom of Italy took it back from the Habsburgs. Thus popes, kings, and *condottieri* have successively ruled in this palace, which in massiveness, size, and the thickness of its walls probably excels every other palace in Rome. Beyond question as regards the spaciousness of its halls it transcends them all.

The great folding doors stand open day and night, but in front of them two militiamen are on guard, and there is a tall porter in a silver-laced uniform to ask your business when you wish to enter. Still, it is easy enough to gain admittance, seeing that in the mezzanine there is an archæological library for which a reader's ticket can readily be procured. A man who made an attempt on Mussolini's life was furnished with such a card. In the evenings I saw

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

a great many young men at work consulting the catalogues. Upon the entresol there is an iron gate to bar the staircase, but this was not always closed. The Duce spends about ten hours a day in these headquarters of his, and it certainly cannot be said that he shuts himself away from the common herd after the manner of kings.

On the first floor there are half a dozen rooms, large and small, which have been tastefully refurnished. The floors are tiled as of old. Above are heavy beams, ancient and grimy. As in every Roman palace, the windows with their stone window seats are the finest features of the interior. The vast halls are empty, with nothing more than a ponderous table of ancient date occupying the middle of each, and chairs which no one uses ranged round the walls. On these latter, distempered in orange or dull blue, hang pictures: Madonnas, portraits, landscapes by Veronese and Mainardi. Here and there are frescoes which may or may not be the work of Raphael.

There are glass-fronted cupboards, too, lighted from within, containing precious majolicas dating back to the thirteenth century, bejewelled images of the Blessed Virgin, priestly vestments, lace, and carven figures of the saints. A Byzantine chest made

## INTRODUCTION

of ivory is said to be more than a thousand years old. As one looks at the smoked glassware from Murano, at greenish-gold bowls and goblets, and one's eye turns then to measure the thickness of the walls as displayed in the window recesses, one cannot but think of the gaily clad women whom the lords of this fortress, masters of many halberds and many spears, used to capture and cage within it — until, perhaps, wearying of the splendid prison, they took vengeance by poisoning the *condottieri* who had carried them off. Weapons and armour, likewise, are part of the furnishing of this old-world palace: headless knights menacing of aspect, figures having a greyish-blue sheen like that of the sky just before a thunderstorm. In front of these empty shells is a huge chest containing swords and daggers; and beside the huge weapons with which bears were hunted lies the richly chased sword of justice.

If the visitor is to be admitted to the presence, the chief among the attendants ushers him to the great inner doors. This man ranks as a "*cavaliere*," and is a figure of comic opera. But when the doors are flung open it is to disclose that which makes us feel we are contemplating a landscape rather than the interior of a room.

This place in which Mussolini has carried on his

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

work for several years now, its windows giving on the Piazza di Venezia, is known as the Hall of the Mappa Mundi, for it was here that in former days the first of all terrestrial globes was installed. The room was built in the middle of the fifteenth century and, having become ruinous, has recently been restored. It is more than sixty feet long, forty feet wide, and forty feet high. There are two doors in the party wall leading into the anteroom, and from this one door opens into the great hall. Here we see a long wall interrupted by three gigantic windows with stone window seats beneath, while the opposite wall is punctuated by painted columns. The place seems to be absolutely empty, containing neither tables nor chairs, not even chairs placed along the walls; in the corners are tall torches with gilded flames, nowadays the standards for electric lights. In the far distance, so far away that we feel the need for a field glass, we see in silhouette the face of a man seated at a table, writing.

Entering this great hall, the first thing that strikes us is the richly decorated ceiling which bears in relief the lion of Saint Mark and the she-wolf of Rome. Halfway along the wall facing the windows are displayed the arms of the three popes who built the palace. Advancing across the renovated flooring, we

## INTRODUCTION

come, in the centre of the room, to a nearly life-sized mosaic of nude women and children, bearing fruit; this is the Abundanzia, and I always made a detour to avoid treading on it. At length, in the remotest corner, we reached a table about twelve feet long, standing upon a carpet and flanked by two Savonarola chairs. Close by these, against the wall, stands a tall reading desk on which lies a modern atlas. This was open to show the map of Europe. Adjoining the other end of the table is an enormous fireplace, cold as the marble which encompasses it.

Behind the table, facing the windows, sits Mussolini; rising, however, and advancing to meet a visitor from abroad. His writing table is in the meticulous order of the strenuous worker. Since he clears up everything from day to day and tolerates no remnants, one small portfolio suffices to hold everything that relates to current affairs. Behind him, on an occasional table, are books actually in use, and we notice three telephones. The table is plain and unadorned, bearing no more than a bronze lion and writing materials arranged with precision. The impression produced by the worktable, like the impression produced by the great hall, is that of composure — the composure of a man whose experiences have been multifarious.

# TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

## THE CONVERSATIONS

Our conversations took place evening after evening across this table. The reader must understand that their fundamental theme is not so much the burning questions we discussed as the character of Mussolini which, in its manifold facets, I was endeavouring to grasp. The following pages, therefore, are not Platonic dialogues in which this subject or that is exhaustively dealt with. Nevertheless, the nature of our talks is based upon the polarity of the interlocutors. I had devoted much time and thought to the question how I could best confront my own views with his, how I could most effectively induce him to speak frankly and freely while avoiding the danger of entering into one of those ponderous "disputations" which are fatal to conversation in any true sense of the term. He knew that upon two matters of primary importance I was radically opposed to him and that there was no likelihood of my coming over into his camp; but this very fact may have been a stimulus. Furthermore, I was inclined to stress my opposition in the hope of making him more emphatic and lucid in his rejoinders. Yet I had to avoid a contradictiousness which would have made our conversations interminable; and,

## INTRODUCTION

since he had put no restriction upon the number of our interviews, I felt it incumbent upon me to avoid wasting his time. Besides, I find it more congenial to leave my readers untrammelled. Let each come to his own conclusion regarding the questions mooted in this book — a conclusion which will vary in accordance with his general principles and will lead perhaps to one side in one topic and to another side in another. The result of this method of approach is that in my talks with Mussolini neither of us will be found "to get the best of it" without qualification. Problems are formulated, not solved.

For me, the dictator of Italy has become a historical figure, and, since he let me follow my own bent, I questioned him as I have been accustomed to question other historical figures. In this matter I can make no difference between the living and the dead. When I shook hands with Edison it was with the feeling "This is Archimedes!" With Napoleon I had, in imagination, held a hundred long conversations before I took up my pen to describe the Emperor. In Mussolini's case, certainly, the antithesis was more conspicuous. We might well regard these conversations as a dialogue between a fully armed Reason of State and a Pacifist Individualism. The contrasts between us are extensive, and even his edu-

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

cation has been very different from mine. Our point of contact is Nietzsche, whose name cropped up more often in the actual talks than in their condensed reproduction.

What I was studying was the man's character in the widest sense of the term. Since, however, I have had no private documents available for the purposes of this study, and since in actual conversation with a living man I could learn far less of his intimate life than I could learn of the intimate life of Bismarck or of Lincoln by the perusal of their letters, I have been restricted to such an impressionist picture as can be achieved on the basis of talks concerning purely abstract matters. This book is an attempt at indirect portraiture. One who regards as trifling the question what kind of music a statesman loves has failed to understand the art of mental analysis, for in truth such matters exert a decisive influence upon action. Owing to the world's ignorance of Bismarck's inner life, there had become current a distorted picture of him as a swashbuckling cavalry officer, and it was this picture which I endeavoured to replace by a new one. In Mussolini's case I am trying to do the same thing while the man yet lives, in order to substitute a new picture for the views and the trends of the contemporary world.



## INTRODUCTION

In my undertaking I had to confine myself to the man of fifty or thereabouts who sat opposite me. If, occasionally, I delved into his past, this was not done in order to disclose the contradictions which must necessarily manifest themselves between the ages of forty and fifty in a person who is playing a notable part in the world, nor was it done in order to study the individual of those earlier days, since for this a biography would have been requisite. According to my conviction that each man's destiny has a logic of its own, no biography can be written of one who is still in the third act of his life drama. No, my aim has been, over and above describing the personality of Mussolini, to characterise the man of action in general, and to show once again how closely akin are the poet and the statesman.

But the following conversations, be they devoted to political, historical, or moral topics, still remain conversations on the psychological plane. Even when concrete questions are put and answered, the underlying aim is invariably to emphasise the distinctive traits of the central figure. It will be futile for the reader to look for sensationalism. The sublime calm of Mussolini and the august serenity of the great hall gave our converse an extremely serious

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

tone. One who wishes to take soundings of the sea must not attempt to do so during a storm. My own independence and the indulgence of him whom I questioned left me perfectly free to ask whatever I would — and, for this very reason, imposed discretion.

I was dealing with a lion, mighty but high-strung and nervous. I had to keep him in a good mood and to make sure that he would never feel bored. When thorny questions came up for discussion, I found it expedient to make historical detours, to assume a theoretical tone, leaving it to Mussolini to decide whether he would consider the problem exhaustively. At the same time, I had to drive at a speed of a hundred miles an hour in order, in the short time allotted, to get to the end of my program. Let me confess that the tension of these hours of converse in a foreign tongue induced great fatigue. I venture to hope that Mussolini, too, was perhaps a little tired! For my part, anyhow, I came home each day like a sportsman who has fired many shots, but does not know how successful he has been until he empties his game bag.

During our talks, no superfluous word was uttered. Courteously but firmly, Mussolini dismissed me when the hour was up, to resume the thread of

## INTRODUCTION

our discourse punctually on the following day. We were never interrupted by telephone calls or by importunate messengers. Owing to this lack of any kind of disturbance, there prevailed in the great hall a tranquillity such as, in general, can only be achieved late at night, when two friends meet for intimate conversation. In earlier centuries, one may suppose, the hall must have been lively with music and dancing, a place where intrigues were concocted in the window seats, and where flattery was rife. Kings and lords must have paraded their glories here, but when they wished for serious conversation they must have withdrawn to smaller rooms, since the hall was only used on great occasions. For the last three years, however, forty-two millions of human beings have been ruled from this centre. The spirits of the popes whose coats of arms adorned the walls, and those of the lion and the she-wolf on the ceiling, may have listened with wonder to our opening talks, to return, after a while, to a slumber which has been undisturbed for centuries.

## REPRODUCTION

After each conversation my first task was to record it as faithfully as possible and without additions. I compressed rather than expanded, and was

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

careful to avoid any kind of staginess (to which Fascism has been unduly prone). I was particularly attracted by the indirect form of characterisation, one lying intermediate between my dramatic and my biographical work.

I retained, however, the lively conversational form, although the subsequent introduction of headlines has emphasised the opening of each new topic. I had in mind something like Goethe's conversations with Luden, the longest Goethe conversation which has come down to us, and one of the finest, because it has not been touched up after the manner of Eckermann, and because the dissent and the memory of the lesser interlocutor have engendered and preserved a remarkable freshness. Consequently I have not drawn a picture of the man, for this would rob the conversation of its chief content. The reader must limn that picture for himself.

Secondly, it was incumbent upon me to remain as far as possible in the background, since my readers want to hear Mussolini's views and not mine, and I have plenty of other opportunities of setting forth my opinions. The last thing I wished was to argue with him in order to maintain my own point of view, my essential aim being to disclose to the world

## INTRODUCTION

for the first time the man of action as a thinker and to reveal the connection between his activities and his thoughts. This seems to me eminently desirable because the arrogance of those who are shut out from the world of action and the folly of the masses have combined to diffuse the erroneous belief that the man of action thinks as little as the man of study acts. In these conversations the historian of future days may find grounds for confirming what Roederer revealed in the matter of the First Consul. Roederer records a great many arguments showing how the Corsican came to decide upon his actions and what he thought about them — such thoughts being more important for our knowledge of the human heart than any action can be.

I was in a very different position from Eckermann and from other memorialists of his kidney. Such men spent year after year in close intercourse with the persons whose conversations they recorded and noted down what was spontaneously uttered. My talks with Mussolini were for an hour a day upon a few successive days and I had to provide the stimulus for what he said instead of being merely receptive.

Since his chief interest is in Fascism, and my chief interest is in the problem of war and peace, neither

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

of these matters emerges as a special topic, but they run as red threads through all the Mussolini conversations.

Naturally, each one of my readers will find this or that subject missing from our talks. Young men who aspire to become dictators will vainly seek for any hints as to how they may become *condottieri*. As for those who want a detailed account of Fascism, I can only refer them to the treatises of experts, who exhaust the topic and their readers likewise. Ladies, or some of them maybe, are likely to complain because nothing is said about the love affairs of the hero; or they will at least want to know something about his manner of life. Rigid Socialists will underline the passages in which, as a historian in the judgment seat, I ought to have confronted Mussolini with the evidence of his apostasy. German professors of history will contemptuously dismiss a work wherein "matters of the gravest import are discussed in a light conversational tone" and will complain bitterly because I have not given chapter and verse for certain sentences quoted by me from Mussolini's speeches. The phenomenologists will be extremely angry with me because I do not use their jargon and have therefore made difficult questions intelligible to the ordinary reader. No

## INTRODUCTION

doubt every one will complain that great opportunities have been scandalously missed.

### MY PARTNER IN THE DIALOGUE

For twenty-five years I had, from a distance, been studying the man of action and had been trying to depict him, dramatically, historically, and psychologically. Now he sat facing me across a table. The *condottiere* Cesare Borgia, whom I had once portrayed in a Roman palace, the hero of the Romagna, seemed to have been resurrected, though he wore a dark lounge suit and a black necktie, and the telephone gleamed between us. In this same hall men of his sort had triumphed and had fallen; now I faced their successor, Italian through and through, wholly a man of the Renaissance. To begin with, I was confounded by the feeling of so strange a resemblance.

Yet my man of action had assumed the most passive rôle conceivable. He who for ten years had always been in command had at length consented to answer another's questions. I had merely submitted to him an outline sketch of the topics I wanted to discuss. His entire self-confidence was manifested in the patience with which he listened to and answered the most difficult questions, and in the lack of any attempt to guide the conversation towards

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

ends chosen by himself. Not once, moreover, did he stipulate that a reply must be regarded as confidential, so that the deletions he thought it expedient to make in my record of our talks were trifling.

For all his outward equanimity, he was perpetually on the alert. It must be remembered that I knew what I was going to ask him, whereas he was taken unprepared; and since my questions seldom related to matters concerning which ordinary interviewers must have asked him, but dealt with feelings, self-knowledge, and motives, he had instantly to look within for an answer, to formulate it promptly, and to phrase it after the manner in which he would like to make his private thoughts known to the world. Nevertheless in his amazing mastery of thought and speech he seemed entirely unaffected, having no inclination either to use superlatives or to raise his voice. He was good-humoured in face of my scepticism and did not make a single answer which seemed directed toward the vast crowd of his admirers. Not once did he use what might have been regarded as an appropriate Fascist catchword. A dozen times he could have coined some "Napoleonic" rejoinder for the benefit of the contemporary world and of posterity, but the reader will not find so many as three in these







## INTRODUCTION

conversations. To about four hundred questions he replied with the same imperturbable repose. To one only which, perhaps, I should never have asked, and which is not recorded in these pages, he responded silently with a glance which implied: "You know quite well that I have nothing to say about that!"

I knew, of course, well enough when he was reticent. Men of action talk about the realities of power with as much discretion as the husband of a beautiful woman shows when he speaks of her charms; they only describe what all the world can see. Still, his reserves, and the manner of them, gave me much insight into his character. Furthermore, this reticence, these reserves, related exclusively to the future. He never tried to twist or to conceal the utterances of his Socialist days, but always frankly acknowledged them. Nor did he ever try to embarrass me by the *argumentum ad hominem*, by asking me, "What would you have done in such a case?" Rarely, indeed, did he reply in the interrogative form, speaking affirmatively, briefly, and to the point.

He loves simplicity of speech and has no taste for sparkling epigrams, with the result that the more concise among his answers sound like abrupt decisions. His style, in conversation at any rate, observes

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

the true Italian mean between French and German, for it is neither elegant nor cumbrous, but metallic, the metal not being iron, but finely tempered steel, and the phrasing elastic and richly modulated in accordance with the Italian tradition. Then, of a sudden, he will say something perfectly simple, arriving at an unexpected conclusion which is presented undraped. His lucid Italian (based, one might think, upon Latin models) contrasts strongly in all respects with D'Annunzio's soaring oratory, this mould of expression sufficing by itself to distinguish the man of action from the Platonist.

With his consent, titles of address were promptly jettisoned, so that I could pursue my questioning without flourishes and without needless delay. He never attempted to correct my faulty Italian; but when, on one occasion, I mispronounced a French name, the sometime schoolmaster peeped out amusingly, and in a low tone he uttered it as it should have been spoken. When, in his turn, he wanted to speak of the "*Umwertung aller Werte*" (revaluation of all values), and, despite his intimate knowledge of our language, made a slip, he corrected himself by adding "*genitivus pluralis*." I may mention in passing that I have heard him speak both French and English with fluency. His memory is so good

## INTRODUCTION

that on the spur of the moment he was able to mention the names of the universities at which a French ethnologist had taught; the names of the Jewish generals who were serving in the Italian army at the date of our conversations and the places in which they held command; and also the date when John Huss was burned.

Like all true dictators, Mussolini shows the utmost courtesy. It would seem as if such men, between races, like to make their steed prance gracefully upon the saddling ground. He never appeared nervous or out of humor, but fingered a pencil while he was talking or sometimes sketched with it idly (I have seen the same trick in another dictator). He fidgeted a good deal in his chair, like a man whom long-continued sitting makes uneasy. It has been said that at times he breaks off in the middle of his work, mounts a motor cycle, and races off to Ostia with one of his children sitting pillion — the police detailed to protect him dashing after him in a desperate attempt to keep in touch.

Speaking generally, he leads a far more lonely life than do the Russian leaders, who meet one another and watch one another in innumerable committees. Since he also leads an extremely healthy life and has managed to secure a marvellously quiet

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

environment, he seems much more likely to live to a ripe old age than statesmen who are incessantly on the go. Apart from the exercise of power, he has no enjoyments. Titles, crowns, and social life mean nothing to him, this being specially remarkable in Rome, where the diplomatic corps is more strongly represented and more authoritative than in any other capital. From this outlook, Mussolini could to-day almost say to himself "I am the State." Yet when two workmen turned up one evening to repair his telephone, he greeted them and bade them farewell with so much cordiality that I could not but think of the cold arrogance which an ordinary "captain of industry" would have displayed in face of so tiresome an interruption.

Notwithstanding his reticence, he has humour, a grim humour which manifests itself in restrained laughter. But he cannot understand a joke and no one would ever venture to tell him what is called a funny story. He loves order and precision. Opening one of the volumes of an encyclopædia, he looks for statistics concerning Italian women and gives them to me down to three places of decimals. Once he said to me, "I have a dislike for the *à peu près*." In the German typescript I submitted to him he punctiliously corrected all the typist's errors. So great is

## INTRODUCTION

his exactitude that when, in search of certain information, I wanted to get in touch with some of his ministers of state, he telephoned to them twice over, giving full details as to the place and time of meeting and as to the materials with which they were to supply me. Thrift, which upstarts are very apt to forget, has for him become so much second nature that he wrote some notes for me on the back of cards of which the other side contained the pencilled agenda of the previous week.

In conversation, Mussolini is the most natural man in the world. Yet I know that people who are themselves poseurs have given a different picture of him.

## THE STATESMAN

One who wishes to know a man of action as he really is must make his acquaintance when he is well advanced in his career, since if he be of strong character, success will develop it. For Mussolini at fifty, mature and balanced, it seems to me that the fundamental moral problem must be to hold a revolutionary temperament in check. I do not think that he will fail to do so, inasmuch as he embodies likewise some of the characteristics of the paterfamilias, and at his present age these tend to become confirmed.

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

But I have a second reason for believing that he will keep the peace.

Taking into consideration all that I have heard and all that I have seen, I have no hesitation in describing him as a great statesman. What is greatness in a man of action? For me this greatness must consist in the coincidence of certain qualities, each present in a suitable dose and combining to make up a character capable of exercising a moral command — capable, that is to say, of constructive work in the grand style.

I think that Mussolini to-day, ten years after the conquest of power, is much more ardently inclined to promote the constructive development of Italy than to engage in destructive activities against his enemies; it seems to me that the victories he seeks are now only victories within the frontiers of his own country. Apart from this, he has two traits which are lacking in most dictators and which are nevertheless indispensable to greatness. Though risen to power, he has not lost the capacity of admiring the great deeds of others, while he has acquired the faculty of recognising what is symbolical in his own achievements. Both these qualities, necessary elements of the Goethean type, safeguard a self-controlled man of power from megalomania and



## INTRODUCTION

range him in that category of philosophical spirits to which all true men of action belong.

Mussolini rose to power without having to make war and was therefore at times exposed to the temptation of seeking to acquire fame as a warrior. For various reasons this epoch of pugnacity would appear to be closed. To-day he has the choice between striving to resemble one or other of two contrasted dictators, the ageing Napoleon and the ageing Cromwell. The following conversations will show which is likely to be his exemplar.



PART ONE



THE TRAINING OF A RULER



## THE SCHOOL OF POVERTY

“**W**HAT about hunger?” I inquired. “Was hunger, likewise, one of your teachers?”

As I questioned him thus, he scrutinised me with his dark eyes which gleamed like black satin in the half light. Thrusting forward his chin as his manner is, he seemed to be communing with the arduous experiences of his youth. Then, speaking in low tones, and pausing from time to time, he answered:

“Hunger is a good teacher. Almost as good as prison and a man’s enemies. My mother, who was a schoolmistress, earned fifty lire a month; my father, a blacksmith, now more, now less. We lived in a two-room tenement. Rarely was there any meat on the table from one week’s end to another. There were passionate arguments and quarrels; ardent hopes. My father was sent to prison as a Socialist agitator. When he died, thousands of his comrades followed his body to the grave side. All this provided a definite trend to my aspirations. Had I had a different sort of father, I should have become a different sort of man. But my character was already

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

formed in the early days at home. Any one closely acquainted with me at that time could already have recognised when I was sixteen what I now am, with all the light and shade. The fact that I was born among the common people put the trump cards in my hand."

This was said in his low-pitched voice, whose sound recalls that of a distant gong. I have heard it in two different tones. Sometimes, when he was speaking in the open, it had a military resonance, reminding me of Trotsky talking to the crowd. In ordinary conversation, however, he never raises his voice, speaking in a way which betokens a purposive economising of his energies. But I have heard him use the same repressed tones in the open air, talking to a knot of twenty workmen who stood round him in a circle. This restraint is emblematic of the man's whole disposition. In general, Mussolini holds himself in check, making a display of his natural vigour only on rare occasions.

"With your constructive instinct," I said, "you take delight in machines. Does this date from childhood, when in the smithy you made acquaintance with the elements out of which machines are built up? Do you believe that the practice of a handicraft has a productive influence upon mental work?"

## THE SCHOOL OF POVERTY

"A very powerful influence," he answered emphatically. "These early impressions are deep and lasting. Watching the hammer in the forge one acquires a passion for this matter which a man can and must fashion in accordance with his will. Down to this very day I am attracted when I see a stonemason building the framework for a window and I feel that I should like to do the job myself."

"I once read a letter you wrote thirty years ago, a letter in which you told a friend about your journey to Switzerland, and said that passing through the St. Gotthard in the night had divided your life into two parts."

"Yes, such was the effect of that night," said Mussolini. "I am sure of it. I was nineteen years old, wrote verses, and wanted to go out into the world to try my fortune. So impatient was I that I abandoned my post as schoolmaster, left my father in prison (not that I could have done anything to set him free!) and, almost penniless, went to Switzerland to make my living there as a manual worker. One does that sort of thing in mingled enthusiasm and despair; but perhaps rage is the dominant feeling. I had been infuriated by the sorrows of my parents; I had been humiliated at school; to espouse the cause of the revolution gave hope to a young man

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

who felt himself disinherited. It was inevitable that I should become a Socialist ultra, a Blanquist, indeed a communist. I carried about a medallion with Marx's head on it in my pocket. I think I regarded it as a sort of talisman."

"What do you think of Marx now when you look at such a medallion?"

"That he had a profound critical intelligence and was in some sense even a prophet. But at that time, in Switzerland, I had little chance of discussing such matters. Among my fellow workers I was the most cultured, and besides, we worked very long hours. In the chocolate factory at Orbe there was a twelve-hour day; and when I was a builder's labourer I had to carry a hod up two storeys one hundred and twenty times a day. Yet even then I had an obscure conviction that I was only being schooled for what was to come."

"Even when you were in prison?"

"There, above all," he rejoined. "There I learned patience. Prison is like a sea voyage. On a ship and in prison a man has to be patient."

I pressed him to tell me about these prison experiences.

He leaned forward into the light of the tall standard lamp, laying both his arms on the table as is



## THE SCHOOL OF POVERTY

his way when he wants to explain something very clearly or to relate an anecdote. At such times he is especially genial, thrusting his chin forward, pouting his lips a little, while fruitlessly endeavouring to mask his good humour by knitting his eyebrows.

"I have tasted prison in various countries, — eleven times in all. I was jailed in Berne, Lausanne, Geneva, Trent, and Forli, in some of these towns several times. It always gave me a rest which otherwise I should not have been able to get. That is why I do not bear my jailers any grudge. During one of my terms of imprisonment I read 'Don Quixote' and found it extraordinarily amusing."

"I suppose that is why you clap your political opponents in jail?" I asked ironically, and he smiled. "But does not the memory of your own prison experiences sometimes give you pause?"

He looked at me in manifest surprise.

"By no means! It seems to me that I am perfectly consistent. They began by locking me up. Now I pay them back in their own coin."







THE SCHOOL OF THE SOLDIER AND  
THE JOURNALIST

"IN Prussia," I said, "even though we disliked drill, military service was so attractive that, long after it was done with, the reddest of Socialists would, over his beer, love to recall the vanished joys of youth in the army. But you, as I learned from one of your letters, when you were a soldier were fearfully patriotic, being in this matter far more ardent than any German Socialist I have known ever was in peace time. Instead of railing at your officers, as did every other Italian private in those days, you expressed a wish to be a thoroughly good soldier. Was it a matter of personal pride or did you wish to do yourself credit as a Socialist?"

"Both reasons were at work," he rejoined. "In truth I was a model soldier. I never felt that there was any conflict between my military duties and my Socialism. Why should not a good soldier be also a fighter in the class war? It is true that even to-day the Italians are very critical of their officers. That

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

makes the latter mind their p's and q's. Besides, a man must learn to obey before he can command."

"I find it difficult to discover when you can have learned to obey!"

"In the army, at least," he said; but he could not think of any other occasion.

"And to-day, after the lapse of fifteen years, do you still think of war as a means of education, like, so to speak, a duel? Do you still hold that such a man as yourself ought to take his place in the trenches, instead of continuing to work at a writing desk; and in days to come, if similar circumstances were to arise, would you send such a man as yourself to the front?"

He looked at me keenly, for he saw that I was a trifle heated and that I had given him a chance to underline his contention. Turning a little in his chair, he placed his finger tips together — a trick he has. Mussolini has beautiful hands, and I have noticed the same bodily characteristics in other dictators. He replied:

"What use I should make of such a man would depend upon circumstances. As for the duel, that is a chivalric form of encounter and I have myself fought several duels. But the school of war is certainly a very great experience. It brings a man

## SOLDIER AND JOURNALIST

into contact with stark reality. From day to day, from hour to hour, he is faced with the alternative of life or death. At the front I saw that the Italians are good soldiers. For us this was the first great test for a thousand years. Yes, I am not exaggerating! Although there have been innumerable wars between the provinces and the city-states of Italy, our nation as a whole has not known war on the grand scale since the fall of the Roman Empire. Not even during the overthrow of the republic of Florence that was four centuries back. Napoleon was the first to test our people under arms and was well content with the result."

Since I had made up my mind never to argue a point with him (for the object of these talks was not that we should convince each other but merely that I should get to know him), I went back to the topic of the trenches.

"It surprises me that you, of all people, found it possible to endure the incessant proximities of trench life. Dehmel, the poet, who went to the front as a volunteer, told me that the hardest thing to bear was that he was never alone."

"Same here," said Mussolini. "In compensation, one learned, above all, the art of attack and defence."

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

"Are you talking literally or metaphorically? Did you learn enough about strategy to turn the knowledge to account in your March on Rome?"

"Literally, I learned something at the front. Though I did not personally lead the march, the advance in three diagonals was decided upon by me in conversation with the generals."

"You were lucky enough to rise to power without bloodshed," said I. "But suppose that some day you were to become involved in a war, that one of your generals proved incompetent and suffered a defeat?"

Mussolini's face wrinkled ironically.

"Suppose! Well, what then?"

"Suppose that the upshot was the destruction of the great work you have been constructing for so many years."

"You know well enough," he replied, perfectly serious once more, "that through all these years I have been careful to avoid anything of the kind."

I had overshot the mark a little and returned to personal matters by asking him if he had ever been grievously wounded.

"So badly wounded that it was impossible for me to be moved! One of the newspapers had mentioned where I was laid up. Thereupon the Austrians



## SOLDIER AND JOURNALIST

shelled the hospital. All the patients except three had been removed. There I lay for several days, expecting from moment to moment to be blown to smithereens."

"Is it true that when they performed a necessary operation you refused to take chloroform?"

He nodded affirmatively.

"I wanted to keep an eye upon what the surgeons were doing."

"It seems to me you must have been an exception in your enthusiasm for the war."

"No," he insisted. "In those days there were plenty of young men who went joyfully to death."

"But what about the millions of the slain? Were they all joyful in their deaths? How, then, do you account for the fact that so vast a war did not produce a single poem worthy of the name, whereas plenty of fine poems were written about earlier wars, fought for vengeance or to win freedom—or perchance its semblance? Speaking generally, can an emotional mood be sustained for several years?"

"No, no," he answered. "As for what you say about poems, the war was too great and the men who fought it were too small."

"The next war will be largely a war of poison gas, a war in which there will be much less scope for

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

courage and little possibility for the personal activity of self-defence. Do you think that the war of to-morrow will still be an important school, an irreplaceable training for youth?"

"Not irreplaceable. Still, it will always be a fine discipline to stand fire. To win freedom from the tremors of fear cannot fail to have a profound moral effect."

Since Mussolini and I were not likely to come to an understanding upon this matter of war, I turned to the question of journalism and asked him whether he had learned much as a newspaper man.

"A great deal," he replied, speaking now more quickly and in a livelier tone, like one looking back upon the culminating phases of his youth. "For me my newspaper was a weapon, a banner, my very soul. I once thought of it as my favourite child."

"And to-day?" I asked. "If you think journalism so important a school, why do you muzzle the press?"

"Things have changed very much since the war," he answered emphatically. "To-day the newspapers, most of them at any rate, no longer serve ideas but only personal interests. This being so, how can they achieve the moral education of those who write for them? Technically, however, journalism remains an

## SOLDIER AND JOURNALIST

educational force for diplomatists and statesmen, seeing that it accustoms them to form their views quickly and to adapt themselves to changing situations. But a journalist should be young."

"Prince Bülow once quoted to me the French epigram: '*Le journalisme mène à tout, pourvu qu'on en sorte.*' But since you think that running a newspaper has taught you so much — and presumably your readers as well — surely you must recognise that any kind of censorship must make an end of this part of productive criticism?"

"That is an illusion," he briskly rejoined. "First of all," he picked up a newspaper, "here you will find one of my ordinances vigorously criticised. In the second place, when there is no censorship, the papers only publish what their paymasters, large-scale industry and the banks, want to have printed."

"Perhaps things were not quite so bad twenty years ago, when you were an interviewer. In those days did you study the physiognomy of your subjects? And did you prepare yourself for the fray, as I have prepared myself before coming to interview you?"

"Of course I did," said Mussolini. "For instance, when I interviewed Briand at Cannes. Not so very long afterwards we met again as prime ministers.

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

I have always been a physiognomist. But to-day, when I read even more newspapers than I used to do, I sometimes think that any four-footed jackass could write better than these fellows do. Especially do I think so when I read attacks."

"You read a lot of newspapers, then?"

"All I can, and especially the journals of my enemies. I collect caricatures too, and have volumes filled with them."

"There have already been caricatures of you and me together," said I. "In a German newspaper I am figured sitting astride your shoulder."

Mussolini laughed, saying:

"Caricature is important; it is necessary. Your people are always saying that the government of Italy is now a tyranny. Have you read Trilusso's satires? They are venomous, but so clever that I have not suppressed them."

"To-day, when you can survey the problems of state from an airplane, do you find that your earlier critical writings were unjust? Or were you already constructive as a Socialist newspaper man?"

"Oh, I used to make constructive proposals even then; but only now am I able to take a comprehensive view, and that makes me gentler in my judgment of my colleagues."

## SOLDIER AND JOURNALIST

"But if you write articles to-day, are you more moderate than you used to be?"

His eyes flashed as he answered:

"I can only write fiercely and resolutely."

"In those earlier days, when your fierceness and resoluteness seemed of no avail, did you think that you were still only in the prelude?"

The sternness of his expression relaxed. In such moments of expansion, he opens his eyes so wide that one feels as if he wished to breathe in the light through them.

"In all that I did, and still more in all that I suffered, I had a definite foreboding that I was being trained for a more important position."



## THE SCHOOL OF HISTORY

SOME one had made me a present of the edition *de luxe* of Machiavelli, which the Fascist State publishing organisation has somewhat too conspicuously dedicated to the Duce. All the same, it is doubtless better that a dictatorial government should acknowledge its obligations to this instructor of dictators than that, while secretly acting on his theories, it should use "Machiavellian" as a term of abuse. When Frederick the Great was yet only crown prince he wrote his moralising "Anti-Machiavel." In later days he became more straightforward, governing frankly in accordance with Machiavelli's principles.

"Did you make early acquaintance with Machiavelli's 'The Prince?' " I asked Mussolini.

"My father used to read the book aloud in the evenings, when we were warming ourselves beside the smithy fire and were drinking the *vin ordinaire* produced from our own vineyard. It made a deep impression on me. When, at the age of forty, I read Machiavelli once again, the effect was reinforced."

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

"It is strange," I said, "how such men as Machiavelli flourish for a time, pass into oblivion, and are then resuscitated. It seems as if there were seasonal variations."

"What you say is certainly true of nations. They have a spring and a winter, more than one. At length they perish."

"It is because there are recurring seasons in the national life that I have never been much alarmed that winter now prevails in Germany," said I. "A hundred years ago and more, when Germany had fallen on evil days, Goethe made fun of those who spoke of our 'decay.' Have you studied any of the notable figures of our political life?"

"Bismarck," he promptly answered. "From the outlook of political actualities, he was the greatest man of his century. I have never thought of him as merely the comic figure with three hairs on his bald head and a heavy footfall. Your book confirmed my impression as to how versatile and complex he was. In Germany, do people know much about our Cavour?"

"Very little," I answered. "They know much more about Mazzini. Recently I read a very fine letter of Mazzini's to Charles Albert, written, I think, in 1831 or 1832; the invocation of a poet to



## THE SCHOOL OF HISTORY

a prince. Do you approve of Charles Albert's having issued orders for Mazzini's imprisonment should he cross the frontier?"

"The letter," said Mussolini, "is one of the most splendid documents ever written. Charles Albert's figure has not yet become very clear to us Italians. A little while ago his diary was published and this throws considerable light upon his psychology. At first, of course, he inclined to the side of the liberals. When, in 1832 — no, in 1833 — the Sardinian Government sentenced Mazzini to death *in contumaciam*, this happened in a peculiar political situation."

The answer seemed to me so guarded that, in my persistent but unavowed determination to compare the present to the past, I considered it necessary to speak more clearly.

"Those were the days when *Young Italy* was being published illegally. Don't you think that such periodicals appear under all censorships? Would you have imprisoned Mazzini?"

"Certainly not," he rejoined. "If a man has ideas in his head, let him come to me, and we will talk things over. But when Mazzini wrote that letter, he was guided more by his feelings than by his reason. Piedmont in those days had only four million in-

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

habitants and could not possibly form front against powerful Austria with her thirty millions."

"Well, Mazzini was jailed," I resumed. "Soon afterwards, Garibaldi was sentenced to death. Two generations later, you were put in prison. Should we not infer that a ruler ought to think twice before punishing his political opponents?"

"I suppose you mean that we don't think twice here in Italy?" he inquired with some heat.

"But you have reintroduced capital punishment."

"There is capital punishment in all civilised countries; in Germany, no less than in France and in England."

"Yet it was in Italy," I insisted, "in the mind of Beccaria, that the idea of abolishing capital punishment originated. Why have you revived it?"

"Because I have read Beccaria," replied Mussolini, simply and without irony. He went on, with the utmost gravity: "What Beccaria writes is contrary to what most people believe. Besides, after capital punishment was abolished in Italy, there was a terrible increase in serious crime. As compared with England, the tally in Italy was five to one. I am guided, in this matter, exclusively by social considerations. Was it not Saint Thomas who said that it

## THE SCHOOL OF HISTORY

would be better to cut off a gangrenous arm if thereby the whole body could be saved? Anyhow, I proceed with the utmost caution and circumspection. Only in cases of acknowledged and exceptionally brutal murders is the death punishment inflicted. Not very long ago, two rascals violated a youth and then murdered him. Both the offenders were sentenced to death. I had followed the trial with close attention. At the last moment doubt became insistent. One of the two offenders was a habitual criminal who had avowed his crime; the other, a much younger man, had pleaded not guilty, and there were no previous charges against him. Six hours before the execution I reprieved the younger of the two."

"You could put that in the chapter, 'Advantages of Dictatorship,' " I said.

His repartee was swift and couched in a tone of mockery:

"The alternative is a state machine which grinds on automatically without any one having the power to stop its working."

"Would you like to leave this contentious topic and talk about Napoleon?"

"Go ahead!"

"Despite our previous conversations, I am not

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

clear whether you regard him as a model or as a warning."

He sat back in his chair, looked rather gloomy, and said in a restrained tone:

"As a warning. I have never taken Napoleon as an exemplar, for in no respect am I comparable to him. His activities were of a very different kind from mine. He put a term to a revolution, whereas I have begun one. The record of his life has made me aware of errors which are by no means easy to avoid." Mussolini ticked them off on his fingers. "Nepotism. A contest with the papacy. A lack of understanding of finance and economic life. He saw nothing more than that after his victories there was a rise in securities."

"What laid him low? The professors declare that he was shipwrecked on the rock of England."

"That is nonsense," answered Mussolini. "Napoleon fell, as you yourself have shown, because of the contradictions in his own character. At long last, that is what always leads to a man's downfall. He wanted to wear the imperial crown! He wanted to found a dynasty! As First Consul he was at the climax of his greatness. The decline began with the foundation of the empire. Beethoven was perfectly right when he withdrew the dedication of the

## THE SCHOOL OF HISTORY

*Eroica*. It was the wearing of the crown which continually entangled the Corsican in fresh wars. Compare him with Cromwell. The latter had a splendid idea; supreme power in the State and no war!"

I had brought him to a point of outstanding importance.

"There can, then, be imperialism without an imperium?"

"There are half a dozen different kinds of imperialism. There is really no need for all the blazons of empire. Indeed, they are dangerous. The more widely empire is diffused, the more does it forfeit its organic energy. All the same, the tendency towards imperialism is one of the elementary trends of human nature, an expression of the will to power. Nowadays we see the imperialism of the dollar; there is also a religious imperialism, and an artistic imperialism as well. In any case, these are tokens of the human vital energy. So long as a man lives, he is an imperialist. When he is dead, for him imperialism is over."

At this moment Mussolini looked extraordinarily Napoleonic, reminding me of Lefèvre's engraving of 1815. But now the tension of his features relaxed and in a quieter tone he continued:

"Naturally every imperium has its zenith. Since

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

it is always the creation of exceptional men, it carries within it the seeds of its own decay. Like everything exceptional, it contains ephemeral elements. It may last one or two centuries, or no more than ten years. The will to power."

"Is it to be kept going only by war?" I asked.

"Not only," he answered. "Of that there can be no question." He became a little didactic. "Thrones need wars for their maintenance, but dictatorships can sometimes get on without them. The power of a nation is the resultant of numerous elements and these are not exclusively military. Still, I must admit that hitherto, as far as the general opinion is concerned, the position of a nation has greatly depended upon its military strength. Down to the present time, people have regarded the capacity for war as the synthesis of all the national energies."

"Till yesterday," I interpolated. "But what about to-morrow?"

"To-morrow?" he reiterated sceptically. "It is true that capacity for war-making is no longer a dependable criterion of power. For to-morrow, therefore, there is need of some sort of international authority. At least, the unification of a continent. Now that the unity of States has been achieved, an attempt will be made to achieve the unity of con-

## THE SCHOOL OF HISTORY

tinents. But as far as Europe is concerned, that will be damnably difficult, since each nation has its own peculiar countenance, its own language, its own customs, its own types. For each nation, a certain percentage of these characteristics ( $x$  per cent., let us say) remains completely original, and this induces resistance to any sort of fusion. In America, no doubt, things are easier. There eight-and-forty States, in which the same language is spoken everywhere and whose history is so short, can maintain their union."

"But surely," I put in, "each nation possesses  $y$  per cent. of characteristics which are purely European?"

"This lies outside the power of each nation. Napoleon wanted to establish unity in Europe. The unification of Europe was his leading ambition. To-day such a unification has perhaps become possible, but even then only on the ideal plane, as Charlemagne or Charles V tried to bring it about, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Urals."

"Or, maybe, only to the Vistula?"

"Yes, maybe, only to the Vistula."

"Is it your idea that such a Europe would be under Fascist leadership?"

"What is leadership?" he countered. "Here in

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

Italy our Fascism is what it is. Perhaps it contains certain elements which other countries might adopt."

"I always find you more moderate than most Fascists," said I. "You would be amazed if you knew what a foreigner in Rome has to listen to. Perhaps it was the same thing under Napoleon at the climax of his career. Apropos, can you explain to me why the Emperor never became completely wedded to his capital, why he always remained *le fiancé de Paris*?"

Mussolini smiled and began his reply in French:

"*Ses manières n'étaient pas très parisiennes*. Perhaps there was a brutal strain in him. Moreover, he had many opponents. The Jacobins were against him because he had crushed the revolution; the legitimates, because he was a usurper; the religious-minded, because of his contest with the papacy. It was only the common folk who loved him. They had plenty to eat under his régime, and they are more impressed by fame than are the educated classes. You must remember that fame is a matter not of logic, but of sentiment."

"You speak rather sympathetically of Napoleon! It would seem that your respect for him has not diminished during your own tenure of power, in



## THE SCHOOL OF HISTORY

which you have become enabled to understand his situation from personal experience."

"No, on the contrary, my respect for him has increased."

"When he was still a youthful general, he said that an empty throne always tempted him to take his seat upon it. What do you think of that?"

Mussolini opened his eyes wide, as he does when in an ironical mood, but at the same time he smiled.

"Since the days when Napoleon was emperor," he said, "thrones have become much less alluring than they were."

"True enough," I replied. "Nobody wants to be a king nowadays. When, a little while ago, I said to King Fuad of Egypt, 'Kings must be loved, but dictators dreaded,' he exclaimed, 'How I should like to be a dictator!' Does history give any record of a usurper who was loved?"

Mussolini, whose changes of countenance always foreshadow his answers (unless he wants to conceal his thoughts) became earnest of mien once more. His expression of sustained energy relaxed, so that he looked younger than usual. After a pause, and even then hesitatingly, he rejoined:

"Julius Cæsar, perhaps. The assassination of Cæsar was a misfortune for mankind." He added

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

softly, "I love Cæsar. He was unique in that he combined the will of the warrior with the genius of the sage. At bottom he was a philosopher who saw everything *sub specie eternitatis*. It is true that he had a passion for fame, but his ambition did not cut him off from human kind."

"After all, then, a dictator can be loved?"

"Yes," answered Mussolini with renewed decisiveness. "Provided that the masses fear him at the same time. The crowd loves strong men. The crowd is like a woman."

PART TWO



METAMORPHOSES



## SOCIALISM AND NATIONALISM

AS I entered, I saw from a distance that Mussolini was fluttering the pages of a newspaper. When I had crossed the ocean of the great hall and had reached the harbour of his writing table, he tore off a half-sheet covered with pictures, handed it to me, and said sarcastically:

"Look! New tractors, only tractors; no big guns! Please make a note of it!"

I saw, indeed, an illustration of a long train of these modern elephants, slowly advancing, and said:

"If I am to make people believe that you are giving away pictures of tractors, I must ask you to sign your name at the foot!"

He smiled, did what I requested, and handed me back the picture as a memento.

"All the same," I said, "it seems to me that you are the man for big guns. That was why, the other day, you referred to your youth as having been that of a Communist. It is one of the paradoxes of your development, explicable enough, however, that you,

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

a renegade from the most pacifist of all political parties, and after spending your prime amongst cannon, should now turn back towards tractors. Your Christian name, indeed, should give you a push in this direction!"

He was silent but amused, while I went on:—

"Is it possible that you do not believe in the magical power of a name? Do you not find it strange that a blacksmith should have named his two sons after two well-named disturbers of the peace?"

"It did not do my brother much good," answered Mussolini. "He lacked the passionate impetus of that Arnaldo after whom he was called. A revolutionist is born, not made."

"Do you think there is any notable difference between the composition of a modern revolutionist and that of one of earlier days?"

"The form has changed. One condition, however, has been requisite through all the ages—courage, physical as well as moral. For the rest, every revolution creates new forms, new myths and new rites; and the would-be revolutionist, while using old traditions, must refashion them. He must create new festivals, new gestures, new forms, which will themselves in turn become traditional. The airplane festival is new to-day. In

## SOCIALISM AND NATIONALISM

half a century it will be encrusted with the patina of tradition."

"Don't you think that many young men are only anarchists because they have no chance of becoming rulers?"

"Of course," he replied; "every anarchist is a dictator who has missed fire."

"But since you feel that you yourself were educated by the revolutionary spirit of your youth, by rebelliousness and originality, why is it that to-day you enforce obedience and order upon the young and construct a new bureaucracy, you who made mock of the old one?"

"You are mistaken," he tranquilly objected. "In our fathers' days, governments had not a sufficient sense of the State. Besides, new times have brought new tasks for the nation; if there is to be a maximum of efficiency, there must be a maximum of order. Here in Italy we have realised as much as is realisable in the present phase of development. As regards bureaucracy, I admit the force of your criticism, but bureaucracy is inevitable. Concerning order, we have to do with historical necessities. We are living in the third act of the drama. There comes a moment when every revolutionist grows conservative."

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

"It ought to make you long-suffering when you remember your own imprisonment, and when those who used to be your friends have become your foes."

"Well, I have not troubled those of my comrades who have ceased to march in line with me."

"It must be difficult," I went on, "for a revolutionist, one who acts outside the law, to impose limits upon himself. In the year 1911, when you were being prosecuted, you said that sabotage must have a moral purpose; it was permissible to cut telegraph wires but not to derail a neutral train. That remark of yours made a great impression on me. How are we to draw the line between permissible and unpermissible revolution?"

"That is a moral question which each revolutionist must decide for himself."

I seized the opportunity of asking him about his plans in those pre-war days.

"If, in the year 1913, you had been successful in the revolt at Milan, what would have been the upshot?"

"Then? The republic!" came the reply, short and sharp.

"But how do these ideas comport with a nation-



SOCIALISM AND NATIONALISM  
alism which was already a fully developed creed?"

"Surely a republican can just as well be a nationalist as a monarchist can be — perhaps better. Are there not plenty of examples?"

"But if nationalism be independent of forms of government, and also of questions of class, then it must also be independent of questions of race. Do you really believe, as some ethnologists contend, that there are still pure races in Europe? Do you believe that racial unity is a requisite guarantee for vigorous nationalist aspirations? Are you not exposed to the danger that the apologists of Fascism will (like Professor Blank) talk the same nonsense about the Latin races as northern pedants have talked about the 'noble blonds,' and thereby increase rival pugnacities?"

Mussolini grew animated, for this is a matter upon which, owing no doubt to the exaggeration of some of the Fascists, he feels that he is likely to be misunderstood.

"Of course there are no pure races left; not even the Jews have kept their blood unmingled. Successful crossings have often promoted the energy and the beauty of a nation. Race! It is a feeling, not a reality; ninety-five per cent., at least, is a feeling.

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

Nothing will ever make me believe that biologically pure races can be shown to exist to-day. Amusingly enough, not one of those who have proclaimed the 'nobility' of the Teutonic race was himself a Teuton. Gobineau was a Frenchman; Houston Chamberlain, an Englishman; Woltmann, a Jew; Lapogue, another Frenchman. Chamberlain actually declared that Rome was the capital of chaos. No such doctrine will ever find wide acceptance here in Italy. Professor Blank, whom you quoted just now, is a man with more poetic imagination than science in his composition. National pride has no need of the delirium of race."

"That is the best argument against anti-Semitism," said I.

"Anti-Semitism does not exist in Italy," answered Mussolini. "Italians of Jewish birth have shown themselves good citizens, and they fought bravely in the war. Many of them occupy leading positions in the universities, in the army, in the banks. Quite a number of them are generals; Modena, the commandant of Sardinia, is a general of the artillery."

"Nevertheless," I put in, "Italian refugees in Paris use it as an argument against you that you have forbidden the admission of Jews to the Academy."

## SOCIALISM AND NATIONALISM

"The accusation is absurd. Since my day, there has been no Jew suitable for admission. Now Della Seta is a candidate; a man of great learning, the leading authority on prehistoric Italy."

"If you are falsely accused in this matter, you suffer in good company. In Germany there is a preposterous fable that Bismarck and Goethe were prejudiced against Jews. Without any justification, the French speak of a certain anomaly as '*le vice allemand*.' The term might be more reasonably applied to anti-Semitism."

"How do you explain that?" asked Mussolini.

"Whenever things go awry in Germany, the Jews are blamed for it. Just now we are in exceptionally bad case!"

"Ah, yes, the scapegoat!"

I returned to the wider question of race.

"If, then, neither race nor the form of government accounts for nationalism, are we to attribute it to community of speech? But ancient Rome, like other empires, was a State in which many tongues were spoken; and in modern history it has never seemed to me that multiplicity of languages was a source of weakness to a State. The Habsburg dominion fell, but Switzerland flourishes."

"I do not think that unity of speech is decisive

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

in this matter," said Mussolini. "Austria did not perish because it was a polyglot realm, but because it was a constrained unification of many conquered peoples under one sceptre, whereas in Switzerland those who speak various tongues have spontaneously combined to form a nationality. Switzerland was able to maintain her neutrality throughout the Great War because the French-speaking element, inclining towards one side, and the German-speaking element, inclining towards the other, were fairly balanced. I regard Switzerland as a very important link in the chain of European States, for, owing to the very fact that she is a composite, she is able to mitigate much of the friction between the two great rivals on her frontier."

"If you are as little concerned as we are about the diversity of tongues, I presume you are not an advocate of a universal language?"

"A sort of universal dialect is in course of formation," he rejoined. "Technical advances and sport are bringing it into being. But Esperanto would make all the national literatures obsolete and what would the world be without poesy?"

"Nevertheless, here in Italy I see flagrant contradictions. In your youth you declaimed against the Austrian Government, which forbade the joiners





## SOCIALISM AND NATIONALISM

of Bozen to use their native Italian. 'If a language is forced on us, we shall answer force with force.' This phrase, penned by a Socialist, that is to say, by a citizen of the world, cannot be excelled as a manifestation of national feeling. Well, I cannot but ask myself, and cannot but ask you, why to-day you are not behaving better than the Austrians did then. Why, in this respect, likewise, do you not step forward into the twentieth century?"

"I am stepping forward into the twentieth century," replied Mussolini with perfect calm. "The people of Southern Tyrol are not being coerced. One hundred and eighty thousand of them are Germans, and there are also a great many Slav immigrants, so that the so-called racial purity does not exist there. If we teach them Italian, it is in their own interest as Italian citizens. Nevertheless, they have German newspapers, German magazines, German theatres. We do nothing whatever to cut the thread of their German descent. If they lived in the centre of Italy instead of on the frontier, we should trouble them still less. Of course, a unified speech is one of the elements of national power. Governments have always recognised this and all of them have therefore done their utmost to unify the national speech."

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

"You are talking after the manner of the nineteenth century," I said. "Before the war, the policy of the German empire in Poland and in Alsace was as shortsighted as are to-day the German and the Polish policy in the same territories. The authorities did not or do not feel sure of themselves. What about the opposite case, when you want immigrants to retain their national feelings? Do you think it really important that Italians living in America should continue to speak their mother tongue? In Chicago I had a talk with a group of Italians and they spoke to me in English."

"You are making a mistake," he said. "We consider it a matter of principle to ask our fellow countrymen to be loyal to the State in which they live. If they acquire full citizenship in the spiritual sense as well as in the material, they count for something; but if they hold themselves aloof from their adoptive land, they remain helots. Since we began to advocate the policy of assimilation, many Italian-born citizens have attained high positions over there."

"You hold, then," I inquired, "that in matters of language and of race, too, there is no such thing as an inevitable fate rousing the nations to mutual hostility?"



## SOCIALISM AND NATIONALISM

"Fate!" he cried mockingly. "Statesmen only talk of fate when they have blundered."

"A fourth reason for nationalism," I went on, continuing my analysis, "seems to me to exist universally in what are called 'the demands of history.' For instance, you once spoke of a colony which belonged to classical Rome."

"That was only a literary flourish," said Mussolini. "I was speaking of Lybia, which was then unpeopled. If the government in modern Rome wanted to claim the territory colonised by classical Rome, it would have to demand the return of Portugal, Switzerland, Glasgow, Pannonia, and, indeed, all western, central, and southern Europe, to the Italian flag."

When making such statements, which in print seem obviously ironical, Mussolini remains perfectly serious, and because he therefore wishes to avoid any mannerisms which would give an abstract flavour to what he means to be concrete.

By a transition whose details I have forgotten, I passed on to discuss the physiognomical results of nationalist education.

"It seems to me that Fascism is changing the faces of the Italians. I am doubtful if this is a matter for congratulation. Goethe said that the finger of God

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

was more plainly visible in an Italian countenance than in a German."

"There is a moral reason for the change," said Mussolini. "Our faces are becoming more tensed. The will to action modifies the features; even sports and physical exercise induce changes. That is why a handicraftsman looks so different from a factory worker."

"Your head," I rejoined, "has been compared with that of Colleoni. Like such comparisons in general, it is only applicable from time to time. You Italians know full well that the *condottieri* were not *condottieri* all the time. Montefeltre was a thinker!"

"Yes," replied Mussolini, "the *condottiere* is not a mere brute. Once in his life, perhaps, he may have been a savage beast. In general, however, these men were no more savage than their contemporaries. It was the times that were savage."

"Does the comparison to which I have just referred please you?" I asked.

Mussolini looked at me with a penetrating glance, thrust forward his lower jaw, and made no answer. At that moment he certainly did look like Colleoni.

## CAUSES OF THE WAR

IN the Air Ministry, Balbo had been showing me the whole of his realm, literally from the cellar, where (as in the case of a great steamship) the working parts of the big machine were installed, to the roof on which the officials played tennis in the evening. The passion for constructive enterprise, which to-day has mastered even the Italian youth, is here intertwined with their inborn feeling for beauty. This building, the latest and the finest in the country, an edifice of which they are all proud, is half Russian, half American. In Moscow, I saw a couple of thousand persons feeding together as practically, as quickly, and as hygienically as here, where the luncheon half-hour was rendered agreeable with music, and where the walls were adorned with caricatures of the air service. But in Moscow there had been three classes of meals, at different prices, whereas in Rome all the members of the staff, from the ministers of state down to the youngest of the secretaries sat down together to eat the same food,

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

though they paid a sum ranging from two to seven lire proportional to their respective salaries. Balbo was prouder of the pneumatic system, by means of which he was able to send hot coffee in thermos flasks to every room of the building, than he was of his flight to South America.

"He seems to me half a poet," said I, when I was telling Mussolini of my visit. "The walls of his office are decorated with oracular sentences."

"Most airmen are poets as well," said Mussolini. "He has written a book and is a man of all-round competence."

"What a pity," I remarked, "that in your Air Ministry ninety per cent. of their energies are devoted to war purposes and only ten per cent. to civilian undertakings. The delight in technical advances is to-day perpetually dashed by this thought."

"You see spooks everywhere," he said derisively.

"If I do, it is because I cannot forget the experiences of the war years."

"I have read your book," answered Mussolini, "'July 1914,' in which you describe the follies and the crimes of a handful of statesmen of both parties. Your account is fully justified. Nevertheless, beyond (or, if you like, beneath) diplomatic intrigues, I discern profounder causes of the war. You your-

## CAUSES OF THE WAR

self say that it is your aim to deal only with July and to ignore the faults of earlier days. In truth the war had become inevitable. There had been too great an accumulation of motives and of tensions; the drama had to be played out. They had conjured up the devil and could not but let him wreak his will."

"And yet," I rejoined, "you yourself have written that the unscrupulousness of the European governments before the war was a disgrace to mankind. As late as July, 1914, you were still exclaiming: '*Abasso la guerra!*' I know that only fanciful ideologists will complain of you for changing your views. One who throughout those multifarious happenings remained consistently of the same mind only showed himself to be a man in whom fixed ideas prevailed, notwithstanding the power of realities. What really concerns us to-day is to understand the motives of those who made the war. Yesterday Marchese X., one of the negotiators of the Peace of Versailles, informed me that hunger was the main reason why Italy entered the war, for your country, he said, was in this respect troubled far more than Greece by the British fleet. At first there was no interference with the food supply of Greece."

Laying his arms on the table, Mussolini leaned forward. This is his combative attitude, but when

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

he assumes it he is collected and resolute, self-controlled and clear-minded.

"The motive of hunger," he said, "played its part; but it was not decisive. No doubt, for purely geographical reasons, the position of our peninsula was a dangerous one. But in this matter, too, my thoughts are revolutionary. The declaration of neutrality was the first revolutionary demonstration against the government which, on theoretical grounds, considered itself bound to the Central Powers. You know all about Count Berchtold's infringement of the treaties."

I replied:

"If, at that time, Italy was inspired by so profound a sense of allegiance to France, why was it that no one remembered that at Villafranca, in 1859, France robbed Italy of half the fruits of victory, whereas it was Prussia which, through the wars of 1866 and 1870 against Austria and France respectively, first established the foundations which made the unification of Italy possible."

He nodded and answered:

"What you say is perfectly true. But there were a number of opposing moral considerations, the invasion above all. On the other hand, at that period, France was greatly loved, and French propaganda

## CAUSES OF THE WAR

could make play with democracy, the Freemasons, and other elements. More especially, the Habsburgs were detested. It was against Austria rather than against Germany that we came into the war. Various trends were at work coalescing to make a mighty current. The nationalists wanted expansion; the democrats wanted Trent; the syndicalists wanted war in the hope that it would lead to a revolution. That was my own position at this juncture. For the first time, the great majority of the nation was actively opposed to the parliamentarians and the politicians. I made common cause with persons of the latter way of thinking."

"Could not you have gained your end at less cost?" I asked. "When the Socialists in Berlin and in Paris rallied to the side of their respective war-making governments, their conduct was, in point of principle, unpardonable, but it was comprehensible enough, for in each country the general belief was that the other had been the aggressor. Italy alone was in the fortunate position of being able to maintain an armed neutrality, which would have enabled her, with an intact army, by mere threats to compel the exhausted victors to make extensive concessions to her at the end of the war. Why did not Italy adopt this course? There was a great deal of

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

talk at that time about national honour, and you yourself often used the phrase. Was it 'national honour' which induced you to take up the sword?"

"Nobody likes a neutral," said Mussolini, "but this was no more than a primary, a sentimental, motive. The most important factor was our conviction that, no matter which side was victorious, we should, as neutrals, find ourselves at the close of the war faced by a coalition. Germany as victor would never have forgiven us for our neutrality; and, had we stood aside, at Paris the Entente would have treated us even more contemptuously than she treated the Central Powers. We had to reckon with the possibility that it would be necessary to take up arms against a combination of States, war-weary though they might be. My third motive was a personal one. I wanted to bring about the rebirth of Italy and I have fulfilled my end."

"But it was your own party," I objected, "which had annulled or at any rate weakened, the nationalist spirit of Italy! Well, you left the party and declared yourself free. Did that mean free from dogma or free from party?"

"Free from party," he replied. "But even as an ex-Socialist I cannot accept your statement of the case. However it may have been in other lands, here



## CAUSES OF THE WAR

in Italy Socialism was a unifying factor. All Italian historians have recognised this. The Socialists of Italy were advocates of one idea and of one nation. From 1892, when they cut adrift from the anarchists at the Congress of Genoa, down till 1911, they battled on behalf of a united Italy. Then came internal disputes and conflicting trends and therewith the decline of the movement began. It was at this juncture that I became convinced of the need for a great stirring of the whole people to consolidate the moral unity of our nation — with or without Socialism."

"But supposing," I inquired, "that the German and the French Socialists had taken a firm stand against the war, or had at least voted against the war credits, — what would have been your attitude?"

"In that case the whole situation would have been different," he exclaimed. "Had the French and the German Socialists taken such a line, everything would have run a different course."

"What did you think about the murder of Jaurés?"

Mussolini pondered a while before answering.

"I knew him personally," he said. "When he was assassinated, I looked upon his death as one of those fatalities which modify the trend of events."

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

"Would Italy have remained neutral but for you?"

"There were three of us working towards the same end," said Mussolini. "D'Annunzio, who had years before aroused enthusiasm for the fleet by his *Odi navali* and now made a fervent appeal to the university students and to the Italian youth in general; Corridono, the working-class leader, who subsequently fell at the front; and I myself, who transformed the Socialist Party."

"I have been told that when the Party expelled you, you shouted, in answer to the hissing and invective which arose from all parts of the hall, 'You hate me because you still love me!' That was a fine saying. I suppose it really happened?"

He nodded assent and thereupon I questioned him once more about his early nationalist leanings. He said:

"As long ago as 1911, when I was still a member of the Socialist Party, I wrote that the Gordian knot of Trent could be cut only by the sword. At the same date I declared that war is usually the prelude to revolution. It was therefore easy for me, when the Great War broke out, to predict the Russian and the German revolutions."

"You were under the spell of the notion that there

## CAUSES OF THE WAR

were 'two Germanys' and believed in all the tales of atrocities!"

"Yes," he agreed. "I continued to admire German literature and music but at the same time I believed in the story of the Belgian horrors. Subsequently, when they were refuted, I publicly acknowledged as much in the Senate, to the astonishment of certain Belgians. Such horrors as occurred were simply the horrors of the war and not German atrocities in particular. An Italian pastor, a Protestant, domiciled in the United States, was sent to Belgium during the war to collect evidence regarding these alleged German atrocities. He wrote me a remarkable letter, to the effect that he had done his utmost to find substantiation, for this was needed to use in war propaganda. 'Unfortunately, although I spent months upon the search, I could not discover any atrocities.' "

"It seems, then," I concluded, "that you waged your own war and made your own revolution. Both of them with success. In the sense of Nietzsche, a sense which combines your views and mine, let me ask you what was your predominant motive? There was little to complain of in Austrian rule in the Tridentino, and you had always been a savage critic of the Italian bureaucracy. The only way

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

in which I can account for your forcible severance from your past is by supposing that you wanted to govern in accordance with your particular fancy. Is it true that your main purpose was to refashion Italy in accordance with your own vision?"

"That was it," he answered decisively.

"I am glad to have your acknowledgment. Most men would be afraid to make it and would wrap up their purposes in a cloud of phraseology."

He eyed me gloomily and said, "I have never tried to prove an alibi."

## ON THE ROAD TO POWER

MUSSOLINI looked pale and out of humour in the lamplight. He ruffled the newspaper in his hand as I came to the end of the twenty yards' promenade from the door to his desk. This was not unencumbered as usual, for on it there lay a thick pile of documents. I knew that the two men who had left him a minute or two before my arrival were bank directors, so I said:

"You are tired this evening. Would you rather postpone our conversation?"

"I have had to study the balance sheet of the Banca di Roma," he said, resting his chin on his hand. "Never mind. Let's have our talk. It will be a relaxation."

The strain he had been undergoing was manifest in the curtness of his subsequent rejoinders. I inquired:

"Had you not many such moments of fatigue, of discouragement, during the war? In your articles, especially in the later ones, you write so bitterly

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

about fraternity that I read into them disillusionment concerning all that happened, even the victory. In one of them you said that the germs of decay are hidden in a victorious nation. That remark is rather too philosophic for a man of action."

He pulled down the corners of his mouth and stared at me vacantly as he replied:

"Was it not enough to make a man weary when these symptoms of decay persisted for years after the victory? Every nation engaged in the war made heroic efforts; but it seemed to us here in Italy as if we were being deprived of the reward of victory."

"I can understand that you felt yourselves to have been cheated in Paris," said I. "But why did you and your adherents speak of a Fiume '*sacrificato*,' merely because your friends of yesterday, the Allies, continued to hold the place? A man who at that time was a prominent figure said to me that Fiume was only thrust into the foreground by the referendum, and that the sole reason why Orlando, the arch-parliamentarian, made such a to-do about it was that it had become a popular catchword. Why should Fiume have developed into a sort of holy of holies just after the war, as if it had played a great part in Italian history and civilisation like Florence or Bologna?"

## ON THE ROAD TO POWER

He continued to gaze into vacancy and said:

"You are wrong in thinking that that was a mere matter of parliamentary finesse. Fiume was an Italian town, as dear to us as any other. In Fiume, just as in Trieste and Trent, there were Irredentists who wanted their native city to become part of Italy."

I alluded to the fact that the number of inhabitants of Fiume who had acclaimed D'Annunzio's raid had, after all, not been very large.

"He was idolised by the people! Naturally such a situation as arose there tends to become oppressive after twelve months or so. Still, there can be no doubt whatever that we owe Fiume to D'Annunzio."

He said this bluntly, without sign of emotion, as one who utters a historical truth about which there can be no question. I went on to speak of the peace, quoted some of the utterances of the delegates to Versailles, and proceeded to inquire:

"Do you blame Orlando for the losses of Italy at the Peace Conference? Was his character flawed? According to certain Fascists, he was one of the most unsatisfactory of mortals."

"The diplomatic situation was unfavourable. Other men than he might have made a mess of things in Paris."

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

"Why, then, was the feeling in Italy so bitter? Considering the victors in the war objectively, it can certainly be maintained that Italy was the only one who not merely conquered her chief enemy, but annihilated that enemy."

"We know that."

Seeing that I could get no farther along this line, I returned to the question of the Socialist attitude during the war, hoping that that would provide a stimulus.

"Really your own case resembled that of your country," said I. "You were the only man who annihilated his own particular foe. But what does that prove against the system, if during the years from 1918 to 1921 the socialist leaders were weaklings? Were not some of your generals incompetent during the war, and yet your troops were victorious?"

"Some. But still there was a mass movement!"

"And was this mass movement to be fought only with its own means? The burning of *Avanti*, the destruction of the telegraphic apparatus — were not these Russian tactics?"

"Much the same. Our tactics were decidedly Russian."

This curt, military style of answering was unusual in him, but to-day it was a manifestation of fatigue,



## ON THE ROAD TO POWER

and perhaps in conformity with the military trend of his thoughts at the moment. I tried to give the conversation a new turn.

"Is it true that in the year 1921 you were inclined to renounce the leadership of your youthful party?"

"No," he snapped, as ungraciously as before. "I told them they must accept my ideas or I should quit. It was necessary to transform a mob into a party."

"Why did you hold back for a year when many of your followers wanted to take instant action?"

"It would have been a mistake."

"I have been told by a friend of mine that when, at that date, you visited the Wilhelmstrasse, you said: 'At this juncture there are only two parties in Italy, myself and the King!'"

"That's all right."

"And when subsequently, in the autumn of 1922, you sent your conditions to the Facta administration, were you confident that he would reject them?"

"Certainly. Wanted to gain time."

"What do you think of generals who break their oath of allegiance to an established government in order to make a revolution and set up a new one —

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

like the four who participated in your March on Rome?"

"In certain historical crises that must happen."

"Your proclamation was printed before you set out. Hadn't you the feeling that you were forestalling things?"

"There wasn't a moment to lose."

"How do you account for the fact that there was no resistance to your March on Rome? It was just like what happened in Germany on November 9, 1918."

"Same reasons; obsolete system."

"I have been told that the King had already signed an ordinance declaring a state of siege."

"The ministers had decided on this course, but the King refused to sign, even when pressed to do so a second time."

"Suppose the King had agreed, and a state of siege had been declared, would you have felt sure of victory even in the case of resistance?"

"We held the valley of the Po and it is there that the fate of Italy has always been decided."

"How could you, a soldier, be content during those last weeks to stay so far from the centre of action?"

"I was in command at Milan."

## ON THE ROAD TO POWER

"When you received the King's telegram asking you to take over the government, were you surprised or had you expected it?"

"Expected."

"When on your way to Rome, were you in the mood of an artist who is about to begin his work, or in that of a prophet who is fulfilling a mission?"

"Artist."

He was too laconic for my taste, and so, in the hope of bringing about a little relaxation, I had recourse to an anecdote.

"Do you remember what Napoleon said to his brother when they entered the Tuileries after the *coup d'état*? 'Well, here we are. Let's see to it that we stay here!'"

It was a palpable hit. Mussolini laughed. The spell the bank directors had laid upon his nerves was broken. His customary serenity had returned, so that he could speak once more in his usual voice and formulate his views at reasonable length. When I went on to question him about his personal, his mental preparation for the rôle of leadership, he thrust the thick balance sheet aside, laid his arms on the table in front of him, and then became reminiscent.

"I was prepared as far as broad lines were con-

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

cerned, but not in matters of detail. To begin with, I was overburdened with work. Within forty-eight hours I had to get fifty-two thousand revolutionary soldiers out of the capital and to see to it that these excited young men were held in leash. During the first days the most important affair was to keep the machinery running. But I, who had to do this, lacked first-hand knowledge of the machinery of administration. I promptly dismissed some of the leading officials, but I left a great many of them where they were. It was incumbent upon me to convince the most important civil servants, during the very first weeks, that we were not to be trifled with. They were a danger to me but at the outset I had to trust them."

"That," I said, "was what took all the fire out of the German revolution. The old permanent officials were stronger than the new leaders and humbugged them. But how does one begin a new régime? Is it like setting up a monument, or building a house in the forest, when one begins by clearing a lot of trees to make room?"

"That is an interesting simile," he said alertly. "Most revolutions begin with a hundred per cent., but little by little the new spirit evaporates, becomes diluted with the old. Concessions are made, now

## ON THE ROAD TO POWER

here, now there; and before long your revolution has declined to fifty per cent., or less."

"That is what happened in Germany," I interjected.

"We did it the reverse way. I began with fifty per cent. Why? Because history had taught me that the courage of most revolutionists begins to fail after the first alarms and excursions. I started with a coalition and it was six months before I dismissed the Catholics. In other countries, revolutionists have by degrees become more complaisant; but here in Italy, year by year, we have grown more radical, more stubborn. Not until last year, for instance, did I insist upon the university professors swearing allegiance. I took the democrats as I found them and I gave the Socialists the opportunity of participating in the government. Turati, who died yesterday, would perhaps have agreed to this, but Baldesi and other men of his sort obstinately refused their chances. Since I had planned a complete renovation of my country, I had to accustom it gradually to the new order of things and to make use of the outstanding forces of the old order. The Russians were in a different position. The old order had utterly collapsed and they could clear the ground completely in order to build their house in the forest.

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

But where should we have been to-day if I had set out by making a clean sweep?"

He was full of vivacity once more, all signs of fatigue having vanished.

"Your enemies gave you a helping hand," I said, "by marching out of parliament. I suppose that suited your book and that you had looked forward to it?"

"Of course!" he exclaimed. "They had withdrawn to the Sacred Mount, and that is a hill which brings misfortune to all who climb it."

"In the army," I said, "in the course of the revolution you have made, did you find more good will and talent to begin with or later?"

"Later. To-day people have faith in it!"

"Did you anticipate this? Did you expect to sit ten years or longer at this table?"

He made a whimsical grimace, rolling his eyes as if to inspire fear, but laughing at the same time as if to counteract the impression. Then he said, in low tones, and assuming a playful air of mystery:

"I came here in order to stay as long as possible."

PART THREE



THE PROBLEMS OF POWER





## THE MANAGEMENT OF MEN

HIS equanimity, his imperturbable patience, had been fully restored, when, next day at the same hour, I found him at his writing table. In the interim I had been mentally rehearsing the activities in which I supposed him to have been engaged, the ordinary routine of his daily life. When staying with friends in the country I have sometimes asked myself what has been happening to them between our good-night and our greeting when we meet next day at luncheon. The same general aspect, the same clothing, and yet each one of us has grown a day older and has had intervening experiences, perhaps ordinary, perhaps extraordinary. Mussolini, whom now for several days in succession I had encountered in his office, wearing the same suit of clothes, was engaged in multifarious activities during the period that elapsed between our interviews; yet each time he seemed, as it were, screwed into the place where he awaited me. An editorial office, with its comings and

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

goings and its lively discussions, is a much more animated place than a ministerial office. Perhaps no chance experience, nothing unexpected, had befallen him. These reflections influenced my method of approach.

"Although your rise to power has brought you many advantages, it must have cost you a good deal as well. It must have cost you the pleasure of living in a familiar home, the power to walk whithersoever you please in the evening after an exciting day, the perpetual stimulus of opposition, the enthralling freedom of being unfair on occasion. At the same time it must have entailed upon you the duties of a representative position and the difficulties that attach to a man who can never escape the public gaze. I have been told that soon after the March on Rome you penned an effective phrase: 'One can move from a tent into a palace if one is ready, in case of need, to return to the tent.' Still, it seems to me that such a change of habit must be difficult for a man of forty or thereabouts."

"The change was easier than you imagine," answered Mussolini. "I should have liked to go on living in Milan; but Rome, a city to which I had before paid only occasional visits, exerted an emotional charm. This historical soil has a magic of its own.

## THE MANAGEMENT OF MEN

The fact that I am at work in Rome, that I live in Rome, has during the last ten years given me food for much thought. When I want privacy, I have the garden of the Villa Torlonia, where I live; and the fact that I keep a fine horse there is the chief boon which the rise to power has bestowed upon my private life. Nor have I changed my daily habits much. I have become more temperate than ever, more inclined towards vegetarianism, and I rarely drink wine. Still, these habits are not with me a matter of strict principle and I actually encourage the drinking of wine in Italy. I have always been averse to the distractions of what is termed 'society.' When I have been working all day with others at this table, I have a better use than 'social diversions' for my evenings, in which I go on working alone, and for my nights, when I need sleep. I have always been an orderly and meticulously regular sort of man. When I was a newspaper editor, my writing table was just as tidy as this one, and every minute of my day was planned out so that I could cram as much work into it as possible."

"You describe a Goethean technique," I replied. "One of the ambassadors in Rome recently said to me, somewhat naïvely, 'The Duce has an easier time than we; he does not need to go into society. Had I

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

his advantage in this respect, I could get through much more work than I do.' "

He laughed, and went on:

"I was prepared for my present position by a life that has always been lonely. I cannot live in any other way. My only trouble has been that I have always been sensitive to bad weather. But you are right in this respect, that reasons of state tend to make the statesman's life a narrow one. Just because they *are* reasons of State!"

"It is strange," I said, "how many things the wielding of power teaches a man to renounce."

"Like every passion," he said gently.

"Which passion is stronger, the revolutionary or the constructive?"

"Both are interesting," he answered swiftly. "It depends, moreover, upon the age at which one is engaged upon revolution or construction, as the case may be. A man of forty or fifty will incline rather towards constructive work, especially when he has had a revolutionary past."

"In that respect," said I, "your career differs from those which it otherwise most resembles. Bismarck, like Victor Emmanuel, did not reach his Rome so early as you. To both of them the great opportunity came after the years in which a man has done the

## THE MANAGEMENT OF MEN

bulk of his work. But what you say about the constructive trend in middle age makes it all the more difficult to understand why, after ten years of construction, you Fascists are still talking of a permanent revolution. It reminds me of Trotsky's theory."

"The reasons are different, however. We need to speak of permanent revolution because the phrase exerts a mystical influence upon the masses. It is stimulating, too, for persons of higher intelligence. When we talk of permanent revolution, we imply that the times are exceptional, and we give the man in the street a feeling that he is participating in an extraordinary movement. The actual fact is that construction began right away. Not that it was easy! Thousands of ardent soldiers had to be reconverted into orderly citizens. A revolution can indeed be made without the aid of soldiers but it cannot be made in defiance of soldiers. It is possible when the army is neutral but not when the army is antagonistic. Besides, during the first year, I had to rid myself of a hundred and fifty thousand Fascists in order to make the party a more concentrated force. Not until later could I begin to train an élite in order to transform crude force into orderly government."

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

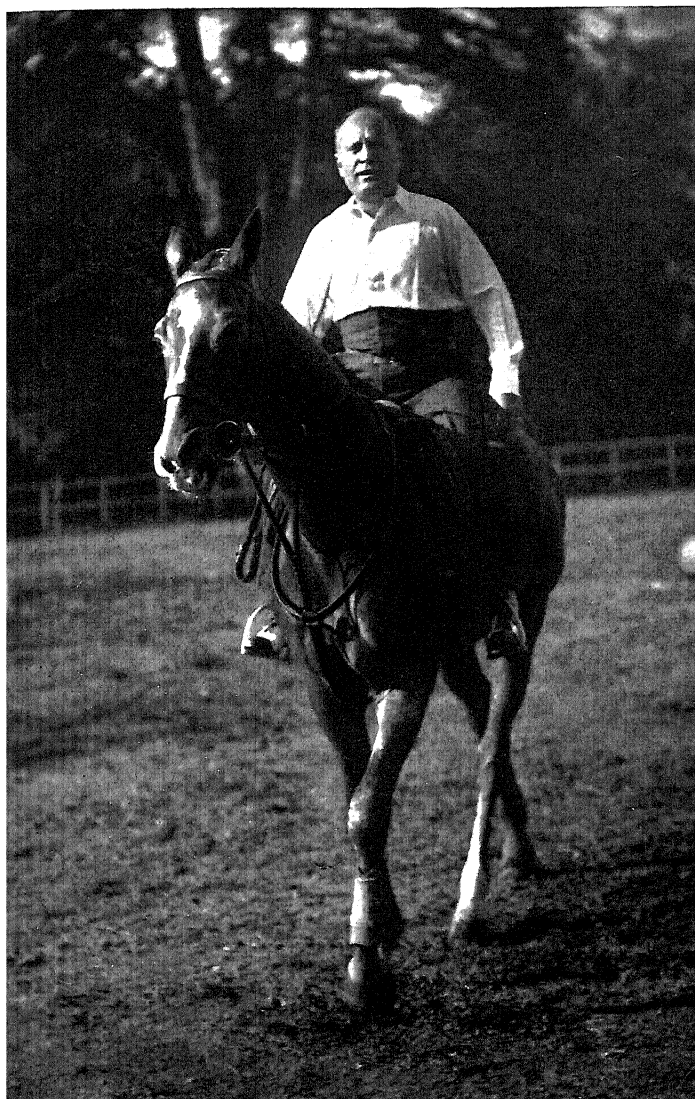
"Where did you encounter the greatest resistance in this respect? Did the nobility prove refractory?"

Whenever a fresh theme of the sort was introduced — a theme which he must have rehearsed a hundred times — he would thrust forward his chin for a moment, like a conductor using his baton, and would speak more quickly than usual.

"Resistance came mainly from the upper classes, but not from the aristocracy. Our titled families proved friendly. Here in Italy they do not form a caste apart, like the Prussian Junkers, but want to be on good terms with the people. You will see Prince Colonna, for instance, talking familiarly with his coachman."

I spoke of his sometime comrades, asked him whether he had been able to find suitable posts for them all, and whether, in general, he promoted men of marked ability regardless of the question of precedence.

"My former comrades," he replied, "were given leading positions insofar as they were fit for them. Seniority does not concern us, whether in the front ranks or the rear, but in general we give the preference to youth. I was prompt to put able young men in responsible positions. I had watched Grandi, Stefani, Volpi, Gentile, and others at work, had







## THE MANAGEMENT OF MEN

conversed with them freely. I am delighted when such men act on their own initiative."

"Such men," I said, "can more readily be supervised when they are in high positions than in low. But what do you do when one of your aides casts doubts upon the trustworthiness of another? What means have you for deciding whether an official is loyal or disloyal? How can you avoid being cheated by those who are playing for their own hand? How do you discover the secret aims of some one newly appointed to office?"

Mussolini fidgeted a little in his chair. No doubt after spending many hours in conversation with his underlings, he is apt to feel restless, but never once did he get up to walk about during our talks. I saw that now he was turning my questions over and over in his mind and ranging them in order before he replied.

"In front of this writing table there are two adjoining chairs, in one of which you are now sitting. If there is a dispute between two officials, I summon them both to these chairs and make them unfold their grievances as they sit opposite to me, equidistant, and compelled to look at each other while they do so. If suspicion falls on any one in the employ of the State or the Party, I give him a chance of

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

defending himself here by word of mouth, provided that the matter is not a grave one. In more serious instances, he has to write out his defence. Sometimes I keep an eye on the private life of my people, study their handwriting, and always take their physiognomy into account, when I wish to draw conclusions as to their trustworthiness. My motto in these matters has invariably been to listen patiently and to decide justly. In the case of a newcomer, my first question is not how he can help me, but what advantage he is seeking when he applies to me."

I asked him how he protected himself against false information and against the betrayal of secrets.

"The important offices in the country are for the most part held by trustworthy Fascists. If loyalty does not suffice to make them run straight, there is the powerful motive of fear in addition, for they know that they are being watched. The penalty for betrayal is formidable, but has very seldom to be inflicted, for I do not allow documents of moment to pass through many hands."

"But how do you safeguard yourself against the most dangerous persons of the modern world — against the experts?"

"As far as experts are concerned," he rejoined, "I generally summon two rivals to sit in these chairs

## THE MANAGEMENT OF MEN

and expound their projects. Of course a financial or military expert may demand from me, as chief of the government, a decision upon some matter concerning which I am not sufficiently well informed. In such a case, my only resource is to do my utmost to master the topic. As far as externals are concerned, our business is facilitated by the speed at which we work. Needless formalities and red tape were scrapped the very first day I came into power."

He handed me a document.

"Here you will see a report from the Minister for Agriculture, and my notes on it, which will go back to him for examination. You know that we have done away with hand-shaking? The Roman greeting is more hygienic, more tasteful, and wastes less time."

After the discussion of these externals, I turned to psychological problems, asking:

"How do you bind people to you most closely, — by honour or by money? By praise or by material advantages? By force or by persuasion? Moreover, is it possible for the chief of the State, in a country where freedom of the press does not exist, to make himself acquainted with the mood which prevails throughout the country?"

At the last inquiry, he knitted his brows and

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

looked at me suspiciously, as if wondering who could have prompted me to introduce this thorny question. With him, during our talks, such uneasiness was never more than momentary. Any one with whom he has agreed to discuss matters freely will find it easy enough to stand fire for a second or two, for then his brow will clear and he will give a tranquil answer.

"I have been able to bind men to me more closely by honour and by persuasion than by money or by force. I use praise with moderation, for praise is certainly a stimulus, but it is one which speedily loses its effect. In all countries, truth lies at the bottom of a well. One has to plumb the well and discover how deep it is. I deny, however, that freedom of the press makes it easier to ascertain the truth — or, indeed, that freedom of the press exists anywhere. Nowadays, where the press is nominally free, economic or political interests are really in control of the newspapers. I have various sources of information: prefects, ministers, private citizens. Perhaps the truth comes to me more slowly, but it comes in the end."

"The whole truth?" I interrupted.

"No one ever learns the whole truth. But there

## THE MANAGEMENT OF MEN

are many signs to disclose the general mood. Before all, I trust my own insight, what I call my 'sixth sense.' It is indefinable."

"Nevertheless," I said, "a good many cases have shown that truth sometimes filters through to you very slowly. You say that the integrity of your officials is the basis of state life. In Russia cases of corruption are discovered. Don't you think that public trials after the Russian manner may be useful? What do you think of the Russian plan of paying ministers of state as little as possible — as if in the Republic of Plato?"

"Our ministers receive from three to four thousand lire a month, which is less than the salaries paid in most democratic countries. Misconduct on the part of officials is punished here as severely and as publicly as in Russia. A Fascist who is detected in misconduct will make away with himself. The Party secretary in Leghorn blew out his brains because he had embezzled funds. The mayor of San Remo shot himself in the catacombs; the manager of the civil engineering works at Naples drowned himself: both of them merely because they had been summoned to come to see me, although not proved guilty. From what I read about corruption in demo-

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

cratic States, I do not think that we have any cause to complain. There is no form of government which can eradicate human fallibility."

Turning to a more personal matter, I asked him how, in view of his knowledge of human nature, he dealt with himself.

"Although you say that you have a synthetic mind, I regard you as primarily analytical. This combination is not an infrequent one. I assume, therefore, that you devote a good deal of attention to the thought of your adversaries. But what do you do when you have yourself made a mistake? Do you find it preferable to make an open acknowledgment and to better your ways or do you incline to maintain the semblance of infallibility? Bismarck said that circumstances sometimes arise in which a statesman must have the courage to say, 'To-morrow it will rain.' If he has made a lucky guess, he will be accounted a great man."

"We make no claims to infallibility here," said Mussolini. "I may be guilty of twenty mistakes but I acknowledge them all. The situation is continually changing under the pressure of circumstances, however much insight one may have into the actions and reactions of one's adversaries."

"Speaking generally, do you find that in this

## THE MANAGEMENT OF MEN

game you hoodwink others more often, or they you?"

He picked up a pencil and, on a piece of paper, sketched a figure throwing a cone of shadow. Then he said, rather to himself than to me:

"There is always an unknown factor. That is the umbra."

After saying this, he sat with bowed head in the lamplight, with the sharp point of his pencil applied to one of the corners of his sketch, as if holding it in its place. He did not, as many would have done after such an interlude, crumple up the piece of paper and throw it into the waste-paper basket, but merely pushed it aside, and then looked up at me with that searching glance which Homer speaks of as *ὑπὸ δαειδών*. Always when Mussolini has revealed even the slightest glimpse of his inner life, he changes the conversation; or, in the case of our talks, whose guidance he had left in my hands, he awaited a new question. This was what I asked.

"Why do you, even you, make use of the formula: 'There is no such thing as the impossible'? You know better!"

"If you are not continually hammering that phrase into indolent people's minds, they will go to sleep and will say to themselves, even regarding

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

easy and simple matters, that these are impossible."

"Yet it seems to me," I countered, "that that is only applicable as an *argumentum ad feminam*."

"Nothing of the sort!" he exclaimed. "Women exert no influence upon strong men."

I returned to the question of his own way of managing men and asked him how he protected himself against continual interruptions and whether he allowed himself to be awakened at night when there was important news.

"As to interruptions, I protect myself by the method of starvation. I only let them awaken me at night when there is bad news; good news can wait till morning. I think I have been called up at night only thrice in ten years: when the post office in Rome was burned down; when the members of our special mission in Albania were assassinated; and when the Queen Dowager was taken ill."

"Do you find that there are special circumstances or special times in which you are exceptionally productive?"

"When I am afoot," he answered. "I often walk up and down my room for a couple of hours before coming to a decision or formulating a statement. My ideas flow most freely in the evening, especially towards midnight. But when does one have ideas?"



## THE MANAGEMENT OF MEN

A man in my position must be stupid at least once a week, or must seem so. On such days I learn a great deal. Inspiration? If one is lucky, that comes once or twice a year."



## INFLUENCING THE MASSES

THE Piazza di Venezia was crowded with twenty thousand people; a dozen bands vied with one another; the songs, the shouts of the crowd reëchoed on all hands. It was a Fascist festival, and the "black shirts" wanted to see their leader. The Palazzo, usually a quiet place, plunged in dreams of the past, had to-day been accessible to me only with the aid of an officer; it was crowded with men in uniform who thronged the staircase and the halls.

In the great room where we were accustomed to hold our conversations, the Duce sat alone, also in uniform. A king once said to me that when he was in uniform his thoughts were different from when he was in mufti; he meant that they were weaker. I myself have noticed that an officer who is alone among civilians feels dressed up and therefore incommoded, just as a civilian isolated among a hundred wearers of uniform finds his position anomalous. Nor have I ever heard two officers in uniform talking philosophy to each other, any more

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

than I have ever seen two thinkers sparring with their fists; although there is no insuperable reason against either happening.

Mussolini, different though he looks in uniform, was the same man as far as concerned his mental outlook. Since the noise in the square and the sense of expectancy made a continuance of our ordinary conversation impossible, I began to talk to him about Abyssinia.

"But I must be going," I said suddenly, pulling myself up. "You will have to make a speech in a moment."

"Go on with what you were saying," he replied, and we walked to and fro in the room until an officer came to inquire whether the windows on the balcony should be thrown open. Mussolini put on his cap, told me to watch from the adjoining window, and to come back to him when the demonstration was concluded. He had not a minute left in which to think over the speech he was about to make. As, in response to the reiterated clamour from the crowd, he stepped forth on the veranda, I noted in his profile the paternal, contented expression which he exhibits when he is talking of constructive work. As he looked for a moment upon the throng beneath, he resembled a playwright who

## INFLUENCING THE MASSES

comes into a theatre and finds the actors impatiently waiting for him to superintend the rehearsal.

Suddenly, at a sign from him, the noise in the square was stilled, his features became tense, and with a vigorous impetus, in staccato fashion, he flung his first words at the auditors. He uttered no more than about thirty sentences, the last of which was followed by renewed acclamation. When the windows had been closed there were heard through the doors of the hall rhythmical calls of "Duce! Duce!" He ordered these doors to be opened and in rushed about sixty Fascist officers who assembled round his writing table. They were the secretaries of the Party from all quarters of Italy. There was no ceremonial reverence nor even formality to interfere with a friendly reception. In his soft, low-pitched voice, Mussolini began to address each of them, not by name, but by the name of the town from which he came, pointing to the person concerned. Occasionally he hesitated and had to ask which was which; but most of them he recognised without difficulty. They all looked to him as to a father, although some of them must have been as old as himself. Then, when he wished to dismiss them with the Roman greeting, one of them called out, "Duce! A photograph!"

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

He smiled, a servant fetched the photographer whom his Fascist officers had brought along, they grouped themselves in the middle of the hall, some of them wheeling up the two easy-chairs that stood in front of the writing table, to stand on them behind their fellows. A flashlight photograph was taken. Everything was done with the utmost cheerfulness, amid quips and jests, an attitude of full confidence of the subordinates in the chief, and perhaps also of the chief in the subordinates. At length, amid renewed singing and shouts of acclamation, the secretaries withdrew from the hall.

Mussolini went back to his desk but stood for a minute or two in front of the fireplace. Seeing on the floor an order which one of his visitors had dropped, he picked it up and thereafter sat down in his usual place. Having rung, as soon as the servant entered the door, he called across the sixty feet to ask where I was. At that I emerged from the deep window niche in which I had been standing out of sight. He smiled at me; while the thought flashed across my mind, how easily any one hidden away as I had been might have assassinated him. It is untrue to say that the Duce is watched like a tsar. Although his speech from the window and his reception of the secretaries had intervened, he wished,

## INFLUENCING THE MASSES

just as if nothing had happened, to resume our conversation precisely where it had been broken off half an hour before. He asked me to continue what I had been saying about Abyssinia. I was refractory, however; spoke of what I had been witnessing; and added:

"I myself have been moved by the significance of these two scenes. I should very much like to know what they mean to you."

"A proof of enthusiasm," he answered shortly.

"Nevertheless," I went on, "you have written harsh words about the masses; you have declared that His Holiness the People must be dragged down from His altar. There was another time, if I remember aright, when you said, 'We do not believe that the crowd can reveal any mystery to us.' But if the masses give you no revelation, how can they have any effect on you? Without mutuality, I cannot conceive of any exchange of influence between one man and twenty thousand. Fascism has been defined as an expansion and a tension. Can you expect these from the masses? And how long will such emotions last?"

Mussolini leaned back into the shadows; and, as the chains and the orders he wore ceased to glitter, I once more discerned the thinker of whom I was in

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

search. The subdued ardour which radiates from him in his strong moments made itself felt. He seemed to be pondering some generalisation that would serve in place of a direct answer, for there was a pause before he slowly began to explain his thought.

"For me the masses are nothing but a herd of sheep, so long as they are unorganised. I am nowise antagonistic to them. All that I deny is that they are capable of ruling themselves. But if you would lead them, you must guide them by two reins, enthusiasm and interest. He who uses one only of these reins is in grave danger. The mystical and the political factors condition each other reciprocally. Either without the other is arid, withered, and is stripped of its leaves by the wind. I cannot expect the masses to face the discomforts of life; that is only for the few. Therein will you find the mutuality to which you referred just now. To-day I spoke only a few words to those in the Piazza. To-morrow millions will read them, but those who actually stood there have a livelier faith, in what they heard with their ears, and, if I may say so, heard with their eyes. Every speech made to the crowd has a twofold object, to clarify the situation and to suggest something to the masses. That is why speeches made to







## INFLUENCING THE MASSES

the people are essential to the arousing of enthusiasm for a war."

"Perhaps you are the greatest living expert in this art of influencing the masses," said I. "But what about those who are not bound to the movement by any special interest?"

"They have hopes and the conviction that they are serving a great cause. I have known the masses for thirty years. In Milan I could empty the streets! There, they called me Barbarossa."

Never before had I heard Mussolini vaunt any of his achievements; but there was a proud ring in his voice when he spoke the words: "I could empty the streets."

"What part does music play in influencing the masses? What part do women play, and gestures, and emblems?"

"They are all spectacular elements," he replied in the same vibrant tone. "Music and women allure the crowd and make it more pliable. The Roman greeting, songs and formulas, anniversary commemorations, and the like — all are essential to fan the flames of the enthusiasm that keeps a movement in being. It was just the same in ancient Rome."

"What do you think of Coriolanus?" I asked, prompted by his last remark.

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

He smiled without looking at me; paused for a considerable time (a thing he rarely did before answering); and then replied briefly:

"A legendary figure! Shakespeare's play is the best print of the legend."

Since this was no more than an adroit evasion, I thought it better to have a complete change of subject.

"You have told me that you prepare your speeches months in advance. What difference does the sight of the masses make in them?"

"It is like the building of American houses," answered Mussolini. "First of all the skeleton is set up, the steel framework. Then, as circumstances may demand, the framework is filled in with concrete or with tiles or with some more costly material. I already have the girder skeleton ready for my speech at our next October festival. It will be the atmosphere of the Piazza, the eyes and the voices of the thousands who will be present to hear me, which will decide me whether to finish off the edifice with travertine or tiles or marble or concrete — or all of them together."

I was much impressed by this metaphor drawn from his sometime occupation as a mason. Lenin, I said, must have fashioned his speeches in much the

## INFLUENCING THE MASSES

same way; and Mussolini extolled Lenin's capacity for disciplining the masses.

"The Fascists," I went on, "talk a great deal about discipline. In Germany, we have had rather too much of it. We have been studying you Italians for the last thirty years and are afraid that your shoulders are not strong enough for the burden. Discipline may make you less happy and perhaps deprive you of your charm."

This pricked him and he turned vigorously from the defensive to the offensive.

"You may say that you have had too much discipline in your own land, but let me tell you, though we are not trying to transform Italy into a replica of pre-war Prussia, we want to make our country as strongly disciplined as was yours. Our conception of the nation is synthetic, not analytic. One who marches in step with others is not thereby diminished, as you and your friends are fond of saying; he is multiplied by all those who move shoulder to shoulder with him. Here, as in Russia, we are advocates of the collective significance of life and we wish to develop this at the cost of individualism. That does not mean that we go so far as to think of individuals as mere figures upon a slate, but that we think of them chiefly in relation to the part they

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

have to play in the general life of the community. Herein may be recognised a very remarkable advance in national psychology, for it has been made by one of the Mediterranean peoples, who have hitherto been considered unfitted for anything of the kind. A sense of the collectivity of life is the new spell that is working among us. But, after all, were things different in classical Rome? In the days of the old Roman republic, the life of the citizen was at one with the life of the State; and when, under the emperors, a change took place in this respect, it marked the beginning of the decline and fall. You see, then, what we Fascists want to make out of the masses. We want to organise their collective life; to teach them to live, to work, and to fight in a great fellowship — but in a hierarchy, not in a mere herd. We want the humanity and the beauty of a communal life. We know that foreigners are puzzled by us! The individual is, in a sense, taken away from the family as early as the age of six and is restored to it at the age of sixty. Believe me, the individual loses nothing thereby, but is multiplied!”

He had become more vivacious than customary, for he was dilating upon his favourite thought. We had reached the barrier which separates an ardent

## INFLUENCING THE MASSES

individualist from Rome as from Moscow. There was no occasion for me to intrude my own notions on the subject. He had read them. What expectation could I have of modifying the fundamental conceptions of such a leader as Mussolini, who for ten years had been passionately striving to realise them? I merely said, therefore:

“Young people to-day have enthusiastically espoused these ideas — and not in Rome only! But there are many of us who would rather not be multiplied in any such fashion. Besides, if you quote classical Rome as a model, if you think that the masses are unchanged, what becomes of what is known as progress?”

“A hard word to define,” answered Mussolini, this time in a rather chilly tone. “Perhaps ‘progress’ is a spiral. Sorel categorically denied that there was any such thing as moral progress, contending that the only progress was mechanical. I differ from him, for I believe that moral progress really takes place, though it is exposed to great dangers. The pace is slow and even at that slow pace men often grow weary. Moreover, what is progress? In imperial Rome there were poets and philosophers. There were splendid institutions for the promotion of public health.”

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

Opening his portfolio, he took from it a sheet of paper which he handed me to read. On it were inscribed figures showing how many public baths and drinking fountains there were in Rome during the third century A.D.

"But no Marconi," I said, "the physicist whose recent discoveries save thousands every year by death from drownings."

"No, Marconi did not then exist," he answered curtly; and once more I recognised how barren was this ancient controversy, seeing that each one of us attaches his own meaning to the term "human progress." I therefore reverted to the question of the crowd.

"You wrote once that the masses ought not to know, but to believe. Do you still regard this principle of the Jesuits as practicable to-day, amid all the advances of modern technique?" He set his jaw resolutely as he answered:

"It is faith that moves mountains, not reason. Reason is a tool, but it can never be the motive force of the crowd. To-day less than ever. To-day people have not so much time to think as they used to have. The capacity of the modern man for faith is illimitable. When the masses are like wax in my hands, when I stir their faith, or when I mingle with them



## INFLUENCING THE MASSES

and am almost crushed by them, I feel myself to be a part of them. All the same, there persists in me a certain feeling of aversion, like that which the modeller feels for the clay he is moulding. Does not the sculptor sometimes smash his block of marble into fragments because he cannot shape it to represent the vision he has conceived? Now and then this crude matter rebels against the creator!"

After a pause he went on:

"Everything turns upon one's ability to control the masses like an artist."



## THE DANGERS OF DICTATORSHIP

“**L**IBERTY!” said Mussolini in his low-pitched, melodious voice. “Since you are continually recurring to this theme, let me tell you once more that in our State the individual does not lack freedom. He has more liberty than an isolated man, for the State protects him and he is a part of the State. The isolated man is not befriended and is, thereby, forsaken.”

“Yet as late as the year 1919, when you were already a Fascist, you wrote some noteworthy words regarding some of these acquirements of western civilisation: ‘Individual liberty, freedom of the spirit which does not live by bread alone; a liberty higher than that which prevails in the barracks of Lenin, other than that known to the Prussian noncommissioned officer — for these are a return to the barbarism of the eleventh century.’ ”

He answered coldly, and in general terms:

“We have endeavoured to realise as much freedom as is possible to-day.”

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

"There would be one way in which you could convince the world of that."

He looked at me inquiringly.

"If you, who for four years ruled amid opposition and criticism, were now, after another six years, to restore freedom of the press and to allow criticism a free rein."

"Of course I could do that, but it would be futile. It would not better the situation in any way. To-day, as I have already said, the struggle lies in the realm of things."

Since I could make no progress in this direction, I introduced the topic of Plato, and asked, since Mussolini had frequently quoted Plato, what he considered to have been Plato's attitude towards the 'State'. Turning in his chair, the Dictator picked up a ponderous tome from an adjoining table, opened it, and fluttered the leaves.

"It is interesting to note that Plato already had a notion of the organisation of the State. Look! Here it is! Warriors, priests, and workers, whom he compares with the organs of the individual human being: the warrior is the arm; the priest is the brain; the worker is the belly."

"Is the priest still the brain?" I asked mischievously.

## DANGERS OF DICTATORSHIP

Mussolini is as indifferent to such petty wiles as if he were some huge pachyderm.

"To-day society is far more complicated than it was in Plato's time," he was content to rejoin.

Closing the thick volume, he leaned both arms on it. There he sat, the Dictator, supported upon the State of which he had assumed full control. He was in a calm and possessive mood, finding me to-day in full opposition, and quietly awaiting the enemy attack.

"There is one thing," I said after a little, "with whose existence in this State of yours you are perhaps less acquainted than are we who look on from outside. I mean the dread which many of your citizens have of informers and talebearers. Their activities arouse feelings of insecurity and hatred."

"Every society," he answered cheerfully, "needs a certain proportion of citizens who have to be detested. In this respect, certainly, we resemble the Russians. But it was Jaurès, the arch-Socialist, who wrote in one of his books that if a revolution is to maintain itself, it must be defended. He used that argument to justify the French Revolution, in which '*la loi des suspects*' was placed on the statute book — a law thanks to which a presumed offender might be sentenced merely on suspicion. Besides, it was a

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

German, Hegel, who declared that the 'people' was that part of the nation which did not know what it wanted."

"As far as politics are concerned," said I, "we Germans will gladly make a present of Hegel to the foreign world, especially to the Russians, who are so fond of quoting him. For centuries we have had experience of dictatorships in Germany, for many of our most incompetent princes were dictators; and not so very long ago Bismarck was dictator for eight-and-twenty years. What happened when he fell from power without having trained any successor? A huge rock had been dislodged and where it had stood the worms came to light."

"Nevertheless it was he who made Germany great," said Mussolini, adding with a smile, "I think I am quoting your own book!"

"Still," I said, "what makes us uneasy in face of uncontrolled power is the dread of what will happen when the man of power passes away. Do you know what Bunsen said of Bismarck? That he had made Germany great and the Germans small."

"Perhaps."

"Is dictatorship an Italian specific?" I went on.

Apparently I could not shake him from his mood of combative repose.

## DANGERS OF DICTATORSHIP

"Maybe. Italy has always been a country of outstanding individuals. Here in Rome, venerable Rome, there have been more than seventy dictatorships."

"What a pity that man is mortal!" cried I. "When you fell sick (it was in 1925, I think), you wrote that everything had become problematical, for you were irreplaceable."

"That was seven years ago. Since then I have been trying to train successors and have been putting them to the test. There already exists a ruling class of first-rate intelligence; for instance, Grandi, Balbo, Botai, Arpinati. I need hardly tell you that there are historical situations which are never reproduced; or, if reproduced, recur only in a mitigated form. One passes from the mystical to the political, from epic to prose. An intelligent man properly equipped with character can represent and govern a nation. I think, however, that there will not be a second 'Duce'; or that, if he appeared upon the scene, Italy would not put up with him."

"You remember," I said, regarding him fixedly, "that Goethe said: 'Genius is always unique' — but. . ."

Responding in kind to my intent gaze, he repeated my "but," and said no more.

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

Grasping at the best way of saving the conversation from extinction, I asked:

"You think, then, that a dynasty would provide the best safeguard?"

"Beyond question," he replied, with equanimity; "a dynasty provides for continuity, supplies the factor of automatic renewal. '*Le roi est mort, vive le roi!*' "

"If it be true," I said, "that Nitti, in the year 1920, aspired to become president of an Italian republic, do you suppose that he was shipwrecked on the rock of Italian monarchical sentiment? In Germany we had had kings for many centuries, but they disappeared, one and all, in the course of a single week. Italy is a much younger country and has had so many republics."

"Only here and there, and episodically," replied Mussolini briskly. "The whole of the south has been used to monarchical rule for hundreds of years. When Crispi broke away from Mazzini, he wrote in a famous letter: 'Monarchy unifies the people, but a republican system disintegrates it.' "

"The last of our kings," said I, "made use of religious belief to buttress their thrones. William II and Francis Ferdinand were both of them convinced champions of divine right and I cannot conceive



## DANGERS OF DICTATORSHIP

of a king who does not believe in that doctrine."

"I differ," replied Mussolini. "Nowadays a king can reign as a sceptic."

"Has the title of king ever allured you?"

"That is a problem in which I have never had the slightest interest."

His answer was as indifferent as if I had asked him about the design of the new postage stamp.

"In the year 1925 you charged the deputies who withdrew to the Sacred Mount with wanting to establish a republic, did you not?"

"They did not know what they wanted."

"Still," I continued, "it seems to me that you protected the throne. And did not the throne protect you on another occasion?"

He reflected a while, in the thoughtful attitude habitual in him when he rests his chin on his hands, elbows on the table, looking downwards, and then slowly raising his eyes towards the questioner. At such times he manifests the restful seriousness of the man of creative temperament whom one would never deem an anarchist.

"Yes, yes, you are right. It is true enough that I protected the throne. As a matter of simple duty, I defend the throne; but at the same time I have a great admiration for the King. I regard him, not

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

only as a patriot, but also as a highly cultured individual. It is likewise true that the monarch has constitutionally and loyally supported my régime."

"Listening to you, I sometimes think that there are still contented countries in the world. Yet there are certain intellectual circles in which grave dissatisfaction prevails. Here in Italy, I mean. Those of whom I am thinking rail against you as the arch-Fascist. Yesterday I received a letter which might give you cause for discouragement. It was written by a man of letters. He said that truth was a rarity in these times, and that liberty was nonexistent."

"A man of letters!" said Mussolini disdainfully.

"Did not you yourself say that the Fascist State was fully entitled to prescribe the duties incumbent upon its citizens?"

"If one sets out from certain principles," he answered, "one must not shrink from the logical consequences of these."

"Your logic is Napoleonic and I have nothing to say against it. But what will your contemporaries in general, what will posterity, think? Do you know that millions of persons, down to this very day, base their judgment of Napoleon's character upon the fact that he had the Duke of Enghien shot?"

## DANGERS OF DICTATORSHIP

"An unfair judgment," said Mussolini, "the execution of the Duke of Enghien was no more than an episode which must not be magnified out of proportion to the whole. Had that execution been Napoleon's whole record, he would have been blameworthy without qualification. Unquestionably it would have been better had this fault not been chargeable to his account. Still, in like manner, one must not pass a harsh judgment upon Julius Cæsar for having had Vercingetorix put to death. Of course his life story would have been a finer one without this act of barbarism, but it is absurd to hold so titanic a figure up to reproach because of one such incident."

"It is possible," I rejoined, "that such occurrences are the outcome of autocracy. When all the power of the State is concentrated in the hands of one man, it may well happen that undesirable things take place in despite of the autocrat's will. When I say this, I am thinking of the murder of Matteotti. Don't you think that such things are more likely to happen in a dictatorship?"

"Political crimes," answered Mussolini quietly, "happen just as often in democratic States. You will remember a notorious instance under Napoleon III. Since the establishment of the Third Republic in

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

France, there have been many strange crimes committed by persons in authority. As for the youthful German democracy, I think that during the ten years or so of its existence there have been more such incidents in Germany than in any other country."

PART FOUR



THE REGIONS OF POWER



## EUROPE

“DO you think that there are good nations and bad ones?”

My question remained hanging in the air, like a little white cloud from a burst shrapnel. I watched it drifting from my lips across the great writing table to poise above his head. Had the walls of this immemorial hall ever reëchoed so strange, so absurd a question? Would not the pope, who frequented it for a time, have laughed at its absurdity? Yet perhaps the inquiry was not so preposterous, after all, for the answer to it forms part of the groundwork of foreign policy — if this be regarded from a more comprehensive outlook than through the spectacles of an ambassador who considers his own country to be the best in the world and believes his own career to be the main purpose for which his native land exists!

Mussolini, certainly, did not laugh, nor did he answer me crudely, as an imperialist would have done. A disciple of Nietzsche, although he is himself a *condottiere*, he analyses problems.

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

"There are neither good nations nor bad ones," came the answer. "Still, there are people more attractive than others. This is a subjective choice!"

"You think the value of a nation, that which makes it attractive, is determined by victory in war?"

"Not alone by victory," said Mussolini. "All the same, victory is one of the elements of its value. Victory counts for something! We see this on all hands to-day. Every nation has shown its capacity for sacrifice. Look at China! Who would have expected so self-sacrificing a resistance in that quarter?"

"You have often declared that preparedness for war is a proof of this capacity for self-sacrifice."

"A part of it, certainly," he interjected.

"I am well aware," I went on, "that at certain times you have been intoxicated by victory. The war of technique, which to us seems unheroic, is a thing you contemplate emotionally, like the spectators at a tournament. As regards the Great War, which for those of my way of thinking, having been carried on for years between two coalitions connected by purely casual ties, eventuated in a mechanical and unspiritual victory of the stronger coalition over the weaker — it seems to you that the stronger, per-



## EUROPE

haps the braver, party was entitled to a laurel crown. In poetical fashion, you extolled '*la vittoria senza misura.*' But when, a few years later, you had risen to power, and, in a treaty, were renouncing the third zone of Dalmatia, you said in the Chamber: 'This is the best treaty we can get.' A wise saying and a manly one! Bismarck, who at one time likewise was intoxicated by victory, said when his blood had cooled that politics was the art of the possible."

"An excellent definition," interpolated Mussolini.

"Comparing your earlier utterance with your later, I infer that during these ten years of power your views and feelings have tended towards moderation."

"I think so," he said in his tranquil, deep-toned voice.

This was not the first time, in the course of our talks, that I had brought Mussolini to the same turning point, and I think the development in question is of more importance to Europe than all the work he is doing for the internal upbuilding of Italy. I know, of course, that such utterances to a private individual like myself afford no guarantee. Still, since I deduced his character from his resolves, from resolves which in this case are decisive for the lives and actions of forty-two millions of persons, I did

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

my best to make him face up to the problem from various aspects, inasmuch as it is a problem which in the last analysis is not a matter either of necessity or of utility, but a problem of character.

"These things cannot be systematised," continued Mussolini, after a pause. "Systems are illusions and theories are fetters. For instance, I regard the network of treaties of friendship and agreement concerning tariffs as greater guarantees of peace than alliances on the grand scale and even than the League of Nations."

"Treaties, too, are fetters," I objected.

"Not a bit of it," he answered. "I once spoke of treaties as chapters in history and denied that they are epilogues. This view has nothing whatever to do with Bethmann Hollweg's notorious 'scrap of paper.' It only means that the Paris treaties, like hundreds of earlier treaties, can and must be modified."

"At the Disarmament Conference, Italy has been making far-reaching proposals. Winston Churchill (you told me once that you esteemed him highly) has spoken of the huge French army as a guarantee of peace. Do you agree?"

"On the contrary."

## EUROPE

"Still, in Italy you train your children for war!"

"I prepare them for the struggle for life," answered Mussolini. "Also I prepare them for the struggle of the nation."

"In Germany," said I, "twenty-five years after the Franco-German War, we were still, in our schools, holding an annual commemoration of the victory of Sedan. This ceremony kept the bitterness of the French alive. To-day our sometime enemies are doing the same thing as regards the Battle of the Marne. Why do you continue such celebrations, which can only mortify the foes of yesterday?"

"When we celebrate our entry into the war, on May 24, 1915, we do not do so as a triumph over the vanquished. This fact will give you the key to my whole political attitude. For us the date is a revolutionary landmark, seeing that then the people came to a decision in defiance of the wishes of the parliamentarians. It was really the beginning of the Fascist revolution."

"It is hard for children to grasp the distinction. Commemorations of victory enter into their blood. Children are cruel to animals and for that reason they are easily trained up to love war for its own sake."

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

"Blood!" he repeated cantankerously. "People seem only to become aware that a war is in progress when blood flows. Have we not a tariff war to-day? Every one buys Ford cars because they are cheaper and while doing so every one curses America."

"You think, then, that a tariff war is a danger to the world's peace?"

"That is why I am opposed to tariffs. I have not raised them so much as other rulers. By building these new Chinese walls, we are, in our 'enlightened' twentieth century, going back to the Middle Ages, to the era of the warring city States."

"Last summer President X., the chief of one of the most powerful States in the world, said to me that the crisis in which we are now involved was of the same kind as those which have preceded it, and would, like those, speedily pass."

"To my mind," said he, "it is something more momentous than that, a crisis of the capitalistic system. The whole system is at stake."

For some time my enthusiasm for truth and for the rights of man had been stirring within me. Now, seizing my chance, I said:

"If you really believe what you say, why don't you found Europe? Napoleon tried to do so and so

## EUROPE

did Briand. Well, Briand is dead and, paradoxically enough, the mantle falls on your shoulders. You seem more ready to accept the heritage than you were five years ago. Your life history would make people regard you seriously if you were to undertake this great enterprise, for a man stands more firmly if, when climbing to a great altitude, he has climbed slowly. Mussolini as the founder of Europe! You might become the leading figure of the twentieth century!"

I dwelt at some length upon this topic, which for me has become a religion. He contemplated me quizzically and answered without enthusiasm:

"True, I am nearer to this idea than I was five years ago. But the time is not yet ripe. The crisis has first to be intensified. New revolutions will come and it is as their sequel that the type of the European of to-morrow will be established."



## FOREIGN LANDS

I HAD been to a first night at the opera and had seen in the boxes more resplendent gowns and had noted the flashing of more jewels than had been visible in the opera houses of Paris and New York of late years. The numberless cars, only half of which could be parked in the square, the abundance of liveried servants, the whole setting, seemed to negate the notion that the world was sick of a fever. Rome, to all appearance, was resolved to deny that a social revolution was in progress. A few weeks earlier I had been in the great opera house of Moscow, where the singing and the acting were just as good, where the dancing was better, and where the stage was no less resplendent. In Moscow, snow was falling on the boards (they were playing "Pique-Dame"), whereas in Rome, Don Pasquale's garden was bright with flowers.

The aspect of the Moscow theatre, with its audience of five thousand men and women, had an ef-

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

fect akin to that of the music of the scene with the Commander in "Don Giovanni." These people clad mostly in drab garments, though here and there a bright dress was visible, were craving for illusion, as they sat looking on and listening to the orchestra, in a sort of restrained tranquillity. They were all under stress of the impending toil of the morrow, and, when we emerged from the portals, there was no press of cars in waiting; merely two or three hack sledges hoping for a fare. It was by electric tram-cars that the auditors made their way home, when the immense reality of the contemporary situation in Russia had swiftly effaced the imaginings aroused by the opera.

Nevertheless the resemblances between the Roman and the Muscovite system are so strong that I told Mussolini about these two operas in order to see what he would say. At first came some generalities.

"Differences! We have private property, whereas there is none in Russia. We have bitted and bridled capitalism, but the Russians have abolished it. Here, the Party is subordinate to the government; there, matters are the other way about."

"Still," I said, "in Italy the Party and the government are simultaneously incorporated in your own



## FOREIGN LANDS

person; and in Russia under Lenin like conditions obtained."

"I don't deny the similarities."

"Before the war," I went on, "you wrote in *Avanti*: 'Socialism is not an Arcadian and peaceful affair. We do not believe in the sacredness of human life.' Is not that Fascism?"

"Yes, it is the same thing."

"You have also written: 'Unless Fascism were a faith, how could it arouse the fire of enthusiasm?' Is not that Communism?"

He nodded assent, saying, "Such kinships do not trouble me."

"It follows, then, does it not, that the faith which both you and the Russians demand and find distinguishes your respective systems from all others?"

"Yes," he said, "and more than that. In negative matters as well we are like each other; both we and the Russians are opposed to the liberals, to the democrats, to parliament."

"In 1919 or 1920 you wrote that Lenin had freed Russia from the autocracy and you foretold that some day that country would become the most productive in all the world."

"Is not my prophecy already on the way to being fulfilled?" asked Mussolini.

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

"Lenin must have known you personally. I have heard that he said to the Italians: 'Why did you lose Mussolini?' "

"Yes, it is true that Lenin said that. I can't remember whether I met him in Zurich with the others. You know that they were continually changing their names. We used all to argue a great deal with one another."

"I wonder that you, with your anti-Slav temperament, could get on with the Russians at all!"

"Well," he said, "the Russians certainly find it very hard to make themselves wholly comprehensible. In their eagerness to reach the bottom of things they are apt to tumble into confusion."

"In your youth," said I, "and when you were a journalist, you used to philosophise a great deal with your comrades. Don't you miss those discussions to-day?"

"I cannot 'philosophise' any longer. I have to act."

This answer was curt, low-toned, abrupt, and definite; as if tapped out in the Morse code.

"When I was in Moscow recently," I continued, "I was struck by two things in almost every one I met — work and hope. Is it the same here?"

## FOREIGN LANDS

"Much the same, but here we cannot find work for everybody."

"Nevertheless you have done wonderful things with the aid of the unemployed. Our objections to dictatorship are mitigated when we take note of your constructive work."

"It is interesting," he replied, "that one of our own ablest engineers, Omodeo, who built the dam for the great reservoir in the valley of the Tirso in Sardinia, is now building a similar dam upon the Dnieper."

"Symbolic," I replied. "You are building, improving, constructing, just like the Russians. You force the banks to support the factories and the factories to maintain the workers. I don't know whether that should be called state Socialism. The name does not matter."

"This is something which it is desirable you should understand very clearly," said Mussolini. "The Fascist State directs and controls the *entrepreneurs*, whether it be in our fisheries or in our heavy industry in the Val d'Aosta. There the State actually owns the mines and carries on transport, for the railways are state property. So are many of the factories. All the same, this is not state Socialism, for we do not want to establish a monopoly in which the State

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

does everything. We term it state intervention. It is all specified and defined in the Carta del Lavoro. If anything fails to work properly, the State intervenes."

"Is this development on the increase?" I asked. "Will the capitalists continue to obey?"

"Everywhere it is on the increase. The capitalists will go on doing what they are told, down to the very end. They have no option and cannot put up any fight. Capital is not God; it is only a means to an end."

"The general impression I gather, is that you are returning, if not to your starting point, at least to the neighbourhood of your earlier notions."

"Speaking generally, I am burning my boats," he replied. "I make a fresh start; but I do not hesitate to learn from my earlier experiences."

Seeing that we had come to a deadlock in this matter, I turned to the question of France.

"You spoke, not long ago, of the unlikelihood of the establishment of a republic in Italy. Do you think the republic is stabilised in France?"

"The republic won the war. That is a firm foundation."

"The French have been spoken of as the Chinese of Europe, because they seem to shut themselves

## FOREIGN LANDS

behind a wall and to ignore, more or less, what is going on in the rest of the Continent. Yet they are greatly stirred by thoughts of power and glory. How do you account for the way in which the petty-bourgeois spirit marches hand in hand with the representative idea?"

"You are mooting a problem which is typical of French psychology," said Mussolini. "On the individual plane, the Frenchman is small; on the national plane, he is great. This is natural enough. The French have centuries of unified national life behind them and have had a succession of noteworthy kings. We lack those memories in Italy."

"It seems to me that you personally have learned a great deal from the French."

"Certainly! From Renan in philosophical problems; from Sorel in syndicalism and other topical questions. But above all I have learned from the French titan, Balzac!"

Without any attempt to bridge the transition, I said:

"The English have sometimes been called the Romans of modern days. You, as a modern Roman, ought to have a considered opinion upon that point."

"The Romans of modern days? No. But they have some of the qualities that were characteristic of the

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

ancient Romans: a genius for empire; tenacity; patience."

"I am surprised," said I, "to find that England is so little loved here in Italy. Do you suppose that is because the British are the strongest pillars of that democracy which you repudiate?"

"It is not the English, in particular, who are unpopular. Foreigners in general are disliked! All our sympathies with the world outside Italy have waned. A new movement such as ours makes short work of traditional phrases. For half a century at least the friendship between Italy and England has been a catchword. We scrutinise the problem and inquire, 'Is there any substance in this alleged friendship?' Then there is talk about the 'brotherhood of the Latin nations.' Are the French 'Latins' and have they shown any sense of fraternity with us? Such revisions as these are altogether in the spirit of Fascism."

"Curiously enough, in the course of my travels I have found you more popular in America than anywhere else. In a hundred interviews I was asked: 'How do you like Mussolini?' Yet the Americans are opposed to dictatorships in any form."

"You are wrong; the Americans have a dictator," he answered promptly. "The president is almost

## FOREIGN LANDS

omnipotent, his power being guaranteed by the constitution."

"True, he might be omnipotent."

"No, he actually is all-powerful."

"Last summer I had talks with both Hoover and Borah. The difference between the two men in respect both of character and political views is even greater than appears at first sight. They differed, too, about the war loans. Do you think that the United States can agree to the annulment of these loans?"

"Not can but must!"

"There are three more questions I want to ask you, questions that were continually being put to me in America."

"Companionate marriage, first of all, I suppose?" he inquired.

I laughed, and he went on:

"A mere fallacy! It does not solve the problem. A great puzzle, sexual relations, and neither civil nor ecclesiastical marriage answers the riddle. Still, taking it all in all, the old way is the best. Your second question, no doubt, concerns prohibition?"

"Of course."

"The problem is thorny!" he said. "For my own part, I am practically a teetotaller, but what is the actual state of affairs? For untold ages men have

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

cultivated the grape and have drunk wine until the habit has become second nature, and then the Americans come along and want to drive nature out with a pitchfork. As a result, they have established an alcoholism much worse than the old. What's your third question?"

"Technical advances and the making of 'records,' " I replied. "I have never shared the highbrow attitude of those men of letters who despise mechanical progress. Some years ago, I read of your first official tour in Sicily, when you drove your own car. I was interested and attracted. Although, up to then, I had been extremely sceptical about all that was going on in Fascist Italy, I realised, of a sudden, that your action was symbolical. It was obvious to me that you wanted to give your people a demonstration of what guidance meant."

With a nod he rejoined: "Most of the objections to technical progress lack justification. This product of the human mind has achieved great results. Where should we be without great ships, huge iron bridges, tunnels, airplanes? Is man to become retrogressive, to return to the bullock cart of antiquity, when he has the motor car, which is so much quicker, more convenient, and more dependable? Where people err is in their perpetual endeavour



## FOREIGN LANDS

to 'go one better' and to rival one another in sitting longest on the branch of a tree or dancing longest without a pause."

"Doesn't it seem to you very remarkable that the inhabitants of such a country as the United States, where democracy has prevailed for a hundred and fifty years, should have so little interest in political affairs?"

"That only shows how capitalism destroys the political instinct. The country in which capitalism has reached its climax is the most unpolitical in the world. Every four years the inhabitants arise from their slumbers to get excited about some such question as whether more liquor shall be drunk or less. Then the defeated candidate wires congratulations to the elected president. Fair play, perhaps; but it is not political warfare."

"Well," I said, "those conditions are peculiarly American. But why, the world over, are there so few capable statesmen at a moment when there is such urgent need of them?"

"Because political life is to-day far more complicated than it used to be. Furthermore, capitalism has swallowed political interest. Now the world is only interested in money. People think of nothing but their own money and that of others. Vanished

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

are the days when all Europe paid close attention to the speeches of Peel or Disraeli; or even to those of Jaurès and Clemenceau! When political matters are discussed on the wireless, they listen to a sentence or two and then switch off. Nobody studies politics. The people do not want to rule, but to be ruled, and to be left in peace. Were there more great statesmen in Europe, there would be less partisanship."

I questioned him about Germany, comparing the Germans and the Americans in respect of industry and efficiency.

"The Germans have achieved wonders during the last decade," said Mussolini.

"How do you account for the present collapse of Germany?"

"Germany was beaten by a world-wide coalition."

"But do you not think that the happenings of the last half century in Germany were indirect causes of the present trouble?"

He hesitated a while, looked at me searchingly, and then said, slowly and decisively:

"Everything that Bismarck achieved during the thirty years of his rule was useful to Germany. It is a matter of supreme importance to a statesman that he should be in power for a long time. What you wrote the other day about Beethoven and Shakes-

## FOREIGN LANDS

peare applies to political life as well, and Bismarck had plenty of time."

"What do you think of German policy during the first years after the war? Do you think that Germany was right to accept the situation without any attempt at resistance?"

"What else could she do? In view of the fierce hatred of Germany which prevailed during those years, and of the fact that the alliance against her was still in being, any attempt to resist would have had the most disastrous consequences. Rathenau, whose acquaintance I made in the year 1922, was one of the ablest statesmen Europe has had during the last quarter of a century. As to what I thought of Stresemann, I expressed my high opinion of him at the time of his death. He succeeded in freeing the Rhine five years earlier than the date fixed by the treaty."

"Was he not the obverse of Mussolini?" I enquired.

Mussolini regarded me with astonishment and I went on:

"He moved forward from nationalism to internationalism."

"But the situation of the two men was so different," said he.

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

"Because the character of the two nations is so different," I rejoined. "The Fascists are fond of talking about the Prussian discipline of pre-war days, and yet that was the time when Prussia had the strongest Socialist party in the world."

He smiled, knitted his brows, and assumed a rather sly look, saying, "There is a good deal of Prussianism in German Socialism. My impression has been that that explains why German Socialists are so disciplined."

"You think, then, that Fascism could be exported to Germany?"

"Nowhither," he answered. "It is a purely Italian growth. Still, some of its ideas could be adapted to German conditions: the organisation of occupations in groups and the organisation of these groups in relation to the State. In your country, the way to a corporative system has already been opened up by the establishment of large-scale organisations and there is but one more step to take. In addition, you could control both capital and labour."

"You said to me once," I rejoined, "that the Italians had been critical for too long and that now it was time for them to learn to obey. The Germans, on the other hand, have been obedient for several centuries and it is surely time for them to become

## FOREIGN LANDS

critical once more. That is why we would rather have five hundred mediocrities in the Reichstag than one outstanding leader. The Germans have a passion for obedience, so we don't want Fascism in our land. Besides, the complete lack of leaders of your sort shows that the 'People of Thinkers,' though it can produce the great teachers of dictatorship (Marx, Hegel, and Nietzsche), cannot give birth to a dictator. That is why the Germans never make an effective revolution."

"But what about Luther?" asked Mussolini.

"Yes, he was an exception to the rule. He was successful. All the same, in order to avoid using the ominous word revolution we, somewhat shamefacedly, call his work the Reformation. You remember that when, in the 'sixties, Napoleon III asked Bismarck whether a revolution was to be expected in Prussia, Bismarck replied that in Prussia only the king made revolutions."

Mussolini returned to the problem of dictatorship in a way I had not anticipated.

"Of all the forms of dictatorship," he said, "Germany prefers the one which is exercised by a powerful bureaucracy, — a bureaucracy that is thoroughly well organised and lives somewhat apart from the world. With you, moreover, dictatorship

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

is not embodied in a man, or even in a number of men, on show in the shop windows. Sometimes you have a dictatorship in the form of joint-stock companies. Thus your dictatorships range from cartels to a dictatorship of the civil servants. You have Holstein on one side and Krupp or Thyssen on the other."

"The world, looking askance at us," said I, "thinks of us as the Two Germanys. You have sketched one of them. The other is the Germany whose gift to mankind was the two greatest thinkers of the nineteenth century, Goethe and Nietzsche. Did you yourself, during the war, lose touch with this second Germany?"

"Never for a moment. That I cannot lose."

## HOME DEVELOPMENT

AS we were flying across the Pontine Marshes, the small unenclosed airplane descended to a level of about three hundred feet and, in the gesture language of aviators, the pilot drew my attention to the ground beneath, which had already been drained. Under Mussolini's régime, there is now being completed on the grand scale a work which two thousand years ago the Romans and subsequently the popes had vainly attempted. An area of hundreds of square miles in which, up till now, no one had been able to live, except for a few months in the shooting season, when the hunters inhabiting the surrounding hills spent a nomadic existence there, has at length been rendered habitable, with the result that in ten years or so there will be a population of many thousands in a region which has hitherto been rendered deadly by malaria. All this countryside was now spread beneath my eyes like a map. I could see the parallel lines marking the new ploughlands, could recognise the main canals and their

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

feeders, dug in order to drain the marsh waters away into the sea.

A few days later I made a motor excursion through the same district, accompanied by Mussolini and hundreds of Fascists; but this was a tumultuous affair and was much less instructive than my cursory view from the airplane.

I had already told him of my previous visit and had brought with me the concluding part of "Faust," in which the dying centenarian says:

"A morass stretches towards the mountains,  
Poisoning all that has been wrested from the wild;  
To make an end of this pestilential swamp  
Would be a supreme achievement.  
It would provide dwelling space for millions,  
Not to live without risk, but in free activity."

Since Mussolini always retains that feeling for symbolical activity which I regard as characteristic of men of outstanding intelligence, he was very much struck by the parallelism with Faust and slowly read the German verses aloud.

At length, when we came to a place where seventy tractors were stationed in two rows to start in opposite directions and plough the ancient soil for the



## HOME DEVELOPMENT

first time, he called me to his side, waved his hand at the machines, and said:

"There you have the centenarian Faust!"

"Each of those tractors costs less than a big gun," I answered drily.

"Costs less than firing a big gun!" said he, to cap my criticism, and laughed.

This was the best moment of that excursion. On a second excursion I watched him mounting the outside steps of a small works office. He stood there for some time in silence, reading a printed notice posted on the wall, the wage scale of the masons. As he did this, I could not but feel that his action was symbolical of the tie between his youth as a mason and his present position as a ruler.

When, that same evening, we were once more seated together in conversation on either side of the great writing table, having returned from the clamour of the photographers in the Campagna to the peace of this great hall, I improved the occasion by referring to what I had seen that day.

"Do you remember how, in the evening of his life at St. Helena, Napoleon spoke of the most effective upshot of his career? He referred to dams and canals, to harbours and roads, to factories and dwelling places — mentioning them all by name, a list

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

that fills a whole page. The names of the battles he had fought disappeared behind these great humanitarian achievements. Is it not true that things of the same sort are what have given you the greatest satisfaction? Have you not long had a desire for such constructive work?"

"For decades," he answered gently.

"In the face of such an avowal," I said, "I am less alarmed by the Fascist demand for more territory. I have never been able to believe that you could think the happiness of a nation depended upon the extent of its domains. All the more, then, do I find it difficult to understand why, in a comparatively small and thickly populated country, you lay so much stress upon the multiplication of births. I should have thought that Malthusianism was more necessary in Italy than almost anywhere else in the world."

Mussolini suddenly flamed up in wrath. Never before or afterwards did I see him lose his self-command in this way. Speaking twice as fast as usual, he flung his arguments at me like missiles.

"Malthus! Economically, Malthusianism is a blunder, and morally it is a crime! A reduction in population brings poverty in its train! When the population of Italy was only sixteen millions, the





## HOME DEVELOPMENT

country was poorer than it is to-day, when we have forty-two million inhabitants. These two-and-forty millions are much better off than half their numbers who lived under the papacy, under Venice, or under Naples — impoverished and uncultured as they were! Thirty years ago I came to realise that in my own home! Manufacturing industry needed educated workers and productivity has increased a thousandfold!"

"The same everywhere," said I, "and not in Italy alone. As regards the strength of a nation, France, with her two-children system, has shown what a country with a restricted population can do when she must."

"France proves nothing!" he cried; the heat of his rejoinder showing that my objection was one he had often heard. "France would have been utterly smashed had not half the world come to her help. Besides, consider this. If in the year 1914, France had had fifty-five million inhabitants instead of thirty-five, Germany would never have declared war!"

"Such being your views — views which I do not share — I can understand why in Italy the procuring of abortion is treated as a crime, though in Germany such an attitude has become obsolete."

Still white with anger, he thundered back:

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

"The Russians can do as they like in that respect, for it does not matter to them whether their increase in population be three millions a year or five millions or only one. Still, not to have a rapid increase in population implies a restriction of national power. In this, we and the Russians are poles asunder."

"Here I am on the side of the Russians," I answered. "Among them, women and men have an equal standing in public life."

This remark only made matters worse. He answered more stubbornly than ever:

"Woman must play a passive part. She is analytical, not synthetical. During all the centuries of civilisation has there ever been a woman architect? Ask her to build you a mere hut, not even a temple; she cannot do it. She has no sense for architecture, which is the synthesis of all the arts; that is a symbol of her destiny. My notion of woman's rôle in the State is utterly opposed to feminism. Of course I do not want women to be slaves, but if here in Italy I proposed to give our women votes, they would laugh me to scorn. As far as political life is concerned, they do not count here. In England there are three million more women than men, but in Italy the numbers of the two sexes are the same.

## HOME DEVELOPMENT

Do you know where the Anglo-Saxon countries are likely to end? In a matriarchy!"

Since in this matter he was not open to argument, I alluded to a point of detail.

"I think, however, that the Fascist State does quite as much for the mother of an illegitimate child as for any married woman?"

"We do as much for mothers as any country in Europe. The mother of an illegitimate child is often in far greater need than a married woman."

Turning from this contentious point on the position of women to the position of labour in Italy as compared with Russia, I asked him whether it was true that in the Carta del Lavoro he had himself inserted a clause to the effect that private initiative was the most effective stimulus to production.

"That is so," he answered, calming down. "But I also insisted that when private initiative fails, the State must intervene. The Carta del Lavoro lies outside the range of capitalism."

"You have spoken of the 'Balilla' as your favourite child. Is not this method of education a danger to the family? And wherein lies the distinction between the Fascist system of education and the education of children by the Soviets?"

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

"Here in Italy," he answered, "we educate them in accordance with the ideal of the nation, whereas in Russia children are brought up in accordance with the ideals of a class. Still, the ultimate aim is identical. Both in Italy and in Russia the individual is subordinated to the State. My aim is, by degrees, by choice of the best specimens, to establish an élite."

"If you want to do that," said I, "you must enroll the best energies of the nation in the teaching profession. If I had to rule a State, the schoolteachers would be the best paid of all the civil servants, for they hold the future in their hands, and I should want to attract the best intelligences into that profession."

"Our teachers," he answered, "are paid ten times as much as when I was myself a teacher thirty years ago."

"I have read that Pelizzi has written about the dangers of obedience and that you disapproved of his remarks."

"Only in this sense," he replied, "that children and soldiers must understand what they are ordered to do. A command must not be absurd. Those who receive it must feel that it is reasonable. Always the interpretation is the main thing, not the order it-



## HOME DEVELOPMENT

self. There is inevitably something cold, something corpselike about the law. Practice, on the other hand, is a human affair, differentiated, full of fine shades. Laws are only a part of human practice and not the most important part."



## ROME AND THE CHURCH

BEFORE beginning to discuss the Church, I spoke of a Roman cleric who had played a great part in the negotiations before and after the reconciliation. The difference in the conversational tone had been disastrous. This venerable priest had behaved as if the world knew nothing whatever about the difficulties and dissensions between the two powers. He ignored them almost completely in the past and wholly in the present. He was the powerful but humble Jesuit whom we know from Schiller's plays and from French novels.

Returning to the question of the temporal power, I began with Cavour's saying, "*libera chiesa in libero stato*" (a free Church in a free State), and asked Mussolini whether he accepted the notion.

"Quite unrealisable with the Catholic Church," he retorted. "If you look closely into the phrase, you will see that it has no meaning. There are only two possibilities: complete separation of the two powers, the State ignoring the Church; or else the

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

State joins hands with the Church for the control of matters of common concern. Both the State and the Church have to deal with the same materials, human beings, the former as citizens, the latter as believers. I have tried various ways. In the year 1923 I wanted to give the Popolari five seats in the government. Don Sturzo brought that scheme to naught. He fancied that he would be able to play with me the game he had played with Giolitti, so I bundled him out, neck and crop."

This was the first time I had heard Mussolini use so strong and vernacular an expression about one of his enemies — which made me suppose that he must have been very much annoyed with Sturzo.

"But why did you postpone the reconciliation for another five years?" I asked.

"It was necessary," he said, "that we should have plenty of time in which to clear up all disputed questions, which were of an extremely delicate nature. Not only that! When the headquarters of the Church are entirely enclosed within the capital of the State, there are geographical and topographical difficulties as well. The capital of the State, and within it a town which belongs to another power! Forty-four hectares at least!"

"Father Ehrle, the German priest who is now a

## ROME AND THE CHURCH

cardinal, showed me his map of the Vatican State in the year 1920. At that time he was out of favour with Pope Benedict because he had published it during the war. Do you know that in your negotiations with the papacy you achieved something entirely new in history?"

Mussolini looked at me inquiringly.

"Never before, you must admit," I continued, "had two independent and absolute rulers living in the same town conferred together for three years without setting eyes on each other."

Laughing good-humouredly, he said:

"Well, I have visited the Pope now."

About this visit to the Vatican, gossip had been rife in Rome. It was said that Mussolini had kneeled and had kissed the Pope's hand. But, visiting him after the reconciliation, I found him filled with animus against the Pope and had doubted the rumour. The matter had a human interest for me, so I approached it from the flank, saying:

"I myself visited the last two popes and found that the formalities they prescribed were entirely different in the two cases. This made me wonder whether a man with a proper pride who is not a believer ought to comply with these formalities."

"In general," answered Mussolini, "I 'do as the

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

Romans do.' That is to say, I accept the customs of a country where I am being entertained. At the Vatican, I was left to follow my own bent."

"Do you believe," I went on, "that a Catholic statesman can get on better with the Church than one who is not a believer?"

"You must distinguish in this matter between a believer and one who is a practising Catholic. Beyond question power and harmony are promoted for a statesman if he adheres to the religion of the majority of his fellow countrymen. But active participation in a ritual is a personal matter. For instance, it is reported that the Minister of State who expelled the Jesuits from Spain attends mass daily."

"In your youth," said I, "you wrote some very fine things in the Nietzschean vein. For instance: 'When Rome passed beneath the sway of Jesus, the dynasty of rulers, perhaps the only great dynasty in history, fell.' On another occasion, you wrote of Christianity that thanks to it, Europe had become impotent of will and yet had not been made reactionary enough to defend feudalism. Last of all, you said that new, free, lonely, warlike spirits, equipped with a certain noble perversion, had come to liberate us from altruism."

## ROME AND THE CHURCH

"That last sentence was Nietzsche's, not mine," he interrupted.

"No," I objected, "it was yours."

We argued vigorously as to the authorship of the remark. Then he passed on to consider the problem implicit therein — to consider it undismayed and with the most perfect frankness. Obviously there was in him a conflict between the statesman and the revolutionist, between the head of the government now reconciled with the Church, on the one hand, and the man's defiant spirit, on the other.

"My position in this matter is difficult," said he, "for the historical outlook cannot be squared with the religious one. The Romans were *beati, forti*. Later they were *deboli ed ignorant*i. The last shall be first. Slaves revolt. Of course Nietzsche was right."

After a pause and an almost inaudible sigh, he went on:

"But when I consider the affair as a whole, perhaps the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. The general influence of Christianity was certainly good. A progressive phase in the history of mankind. If Christianity had failed to make its way into imperial Rome, it would never have become

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

a widely diffused religion. I am firmly convinced of this. Let me add that everything must have happened by the dispensation of Providence. First the Roman Empire, then the birth of Jesus, Paul shipwrecked on the coast of Malta, and at length brought to Rome. Thus, it was predetermined by that Providence which guides all."

I was contemplating a man who, for me, was at the moment a new Mussolini. Certainly there was no other place in the world in which he was so keenly interested as in Rome and it seemed that he regarded himself as a fragment of Roman history. The expression of his face indicated as much during the utterance of those last sentences. I was careful, therefore, not to interrupt his reflections until he raised his head, looked at me with a friendly smile, and seemed ready for a new question.

"Goethe," said I, "and subsequently Mommsen, spoke of the universal idea which has been incorporated in Rome."

"Yes," he said, speaking now in a different tone, with more logic and less enthusiasm; "that is why it would perhaps have been better for the Germans if Arminius had been defeated at the battle in the Teutoberg forest. Was it not Kipling who wrote that the nations which had not been trained under



## ROME AND THE CHURCH

the Roman rule were like boys who had never been to school?"

"But to-day," I rejoined, "you surely cannot think it possible to make Rome once again the centre of the world?"

"Centre of the world only in this sense, that history has thickened around it to a preponderant degree. Jerusalem and Rome — what other cities can compare with these in that respect?"

"Apropos, listen to what I once heard a notable man say" (I purposely, for the moment, concealed the name of the speaker, wishing Mussolini to listen to the epigram without prejudice): 'It was Luther who lost the Great War!'

"Interesting. Who said that?"

"The late Pope, Benedict XV."

"Well, certainly he was a great pope," replied Mussolini.

"At Christmastide I used to find the Roman churches full," said I. "Until recently they were packed in Russia likewise. But now, a decade later, the churches of Russia are empty. Do you believe that the Christian faith will endure?"

"When I look at Spain, I see that the position of the faith is critical. In Spain, too, the churches used to be full to bursting. To-day religion persists but

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

it is superficial rather than deep. All the same, we have to recognise that the war and the world crisis have aroused or strengthened religious sentiment in certain temperaments. Individuals here and there, even army officers, even a German prince, have now become deeply religious."

"Recently you spoke with immense admiration of Julius Cæsar, but placed Jesus above him. That is, if I did not take you up wrongly?"

"Jesus was the greater," he answered; "Cæsar comes in the second place. Just think! To start a movement which has lasted two thousand years, which has four hundred million adherents, many of them poets and philosophers! This is unparalleled. And Rome is the centre whence the movement radiated. Yet it is a very remarkable fact that the most humane among the Roman emperors were the fiercest persecutors of the Christians."

"Yesterday," I said, "when I was contemplating the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius on the Capitol, I recalled a saying of his which I last read under remarkable circumstances, namely, inscribed as a motto in Cecil Rhodes' villa near Capetown: 'Do not forget that you are a Roman; but bear in mind, also, that you are an emperor.'"

PART FIVE



GENIUS AND CHARACTER



## ACTION AND REFLECTION

THE fine rooms which were usually empty when I passed through them on my way to talk with Mussolini were made lively this evening by the presence of twenty or thirty men engaged in good-humoured discussion, after the manner of bank directors in the prosperous old days when, after a brief committee meeting, they were about to sit down to an excellent luncheon. These visitors had come to see the chief about the foundation of a *Città Academica* in Rome and seemed to have been greatly pleased by their reception.

When Mussolini made excuses for having had to put me off for an hour, I told him what had passed through my mind as I glanced at them on my way to him. Certainly all who came to see him, whether as individuals or as deputations, must bring their whole ego to his writing table.

"Nevertheless," I continued, "you yourself always look so marvellously unperturbed. How on earth do you manage to keep so fresh amid all the

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

trifles that come to worry you, constructing, so to say, a marriage out of a passion? Don't you find that the confusion of detail tends to dim your first vision of the State?"

Here I found him, a minute after the talk about the Città Academica, with a mind unstressed; to-day, as on previous occasions, the sudden change from the practical to the platonic seemed to invigorate him, as if he had passed out of a room into the open air.

"No doubt the danger you speak of is real enough," he replied. "Daily practise can sterilise the mind. To avoid this, a man must continually remain in touch with the living and breathing nature of the masses and of individuals. Then he will keep his imaginative impetus alive and will escape the barrenness of bureaucracy. Nothing can be more soul-deadening than bureaucracy, from which all administrations suffer. I try to avert the evil by continually thinking of the human side of affairs, of man with his needs and his duties, his weakness and his greatness."

"When you look back upon those earlier visions of yours, a dozen years in the past, do you find that what you have achieved is conformable with what you used to plan?"

## ACTION AND REFLECTION

"An interesting question," he said, and pondered a while before he answered. "No," he continued, "I do not find myself in the street I had expected to enter. But I am still the same traveller as of old. If I am on a new road, that is because history has willed it. Yet I am the same individual as ever."

"Then experience always leads to modifications in the original plan?"

"Of course! Human beings, the materials upon which the statesman works, are living matter. That is why he is engaged upon a task very different from that of the sculptor, who works in marble or in bronze. My material is changeable, complex, subject to the influence of the dead and also to the influence of women. The whole substance is so plastic that inevitably the consequences of action will differ at times from what the doer had expected."

"Why do you speak of the influence of women?" I inquired.

He never smiled when I tried out one of these futile questions in the hope of "drawing" him. Our previous talks had made me well acquainted with his hostility to women playing any part in political life.

"Women's influence is to me an unsolved problem. On the whole, I am of Weininger's way of

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

thinking, although he exaggerated towards the last. I learned a great deal from Weininger's book."

"It seems to me," I said, "that, like many historical figures I have studied, there is too much of the poet in you for you to act in decisive moments otherwise than intuitively, to act on impulse, on inspiration."

"You are right. The march on Rome was unquestionably an inspiration of that sort. At a meeting in Milan, on October 16th, we decided to undertake it. But the date for the march, October 28th, I chose all of a sudden, for I felt that a single day's further delay might ruin the whole affair. The march on Rome was only possible on that day."

He was silent for a while, deep in his memories; then, preferring, after his manner, to be exact rather than emotional, he added, "Perhaps."

"I suppose, then," said I, "that you are both led and disturbed by premonitions."

"Yes, led — and troubled as well. They are subconscious in origin, these feelings, both bodily and mental. In the summer, I sense the coming of autumn. I have ominous foreshadowings, too, now and again; and there are many days when I feel averse to beginning a new venture. On October 31, 1926, when I was in Bologna, the spiritual at-



## ACTION AND REFLECTION

mosphere seemed to me so oppressive that throughout the day I was anticipating disaster. In the evening there was an attempt on my life."

"Why did you not at that time have special measures organised to protect yourself against such occurrences?"

"Because I am a thoroughgoing fatalist."

"If you were logical in this matter, you would forbid the police to organise any kind of protective measures in your behalf."

"Protective measures," he replied, "can only be effective within limits. I always leave wide scope for the unforeseen, be it good or be it bad."

"Even as regards your decisions in matters of State?"

"There, above all. A law may have the very opposite results from those expected by the law-maker."

"The real is intertwined with the purely imaginative in these matters," said I. "I infer that you believe in talismans. All introspective persons make their own superstitions."

"Oh, yes," he replied. "I have superstitions."

"I have been told that when you heard of Lord Carnarvon's death, you promptly ridded yourself of a mummy which had been presented to you, in

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

the belief that this death was due to revenge taken by the unseen powers for the violation of the Egyptian tomb."

"In that case I was not actuated by superstition," said Mussolini. "People ought not to cart about dead bodies in such a way. It is a profanation."

"You have written a very fine description of your youth. I think it is the best work from your pen. Strange, is it not, that the same is true of Trotsky? When, in this connection, I recall the imaginative writings of Napoleon and others, it seems to me to confirm the view that poetic fire is an essential ingredient of the man of action — if he is to be truly great."

"First, last, and all the time," said Mussolini, "a statesman needs imagination. Without it he will be arid and will in the long run effect nothing. Nor does he stand alone in this need. Without imaginative feelings, without poesy as part of his make-up, no one can achieve anything."

"But what now saves you from letting your imagination run away with you?"

"Experience."

"Unquestionably you are an artist in the use of words. Nor can I think of Napoleon, for instance, as having made a success of his career without this

## ACTION AND REFLECTION

art. Some of his manifestos and speeches won as much for him as victories in the field."

"For the ruler," said Mussolini, "the power of the written or spoken word is of inestimable value. He must always be able to suit the word to the occasion. He must be impressive and vigorous when speaking to the crowd; logical at a public meeting; familiar when he is addressing a small group. Many politicians make the mistake of always talking in the same tone. Of course, when I am in the Senate I do not use the same language as that which I regard as appropriate for the open-air meeting."

"I gather, then, that you believe in the kinship between the poet and the statesman — a kinship I have myself so often detected when studying these two types. Do you think it possible that the dramatist can pave the way for the statesman? Do you believe that in general a playwright is the herald of a revolution?"

"Beyond question," said Mussolini. "First as a thinker and as a man with a richly developed imagination, the poet is almost always a prophet as well, 'the mirror of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present.' Dante is a signal instance of this. He foreshadowed the liberation of the mind which was then about to begin. But in one respect

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

I differ from you; a poet is not the herald of a specific revolution. The course to be taken by a revolution cannot be accurately predicted; its outlines are continually reshaping themselves. Thinkers and poets are like stormy petrels; they feel that a storm is brewing, but do not know from what quarter the wind will blow or what changes it will induce. Take the Encyclopædists for example. They wanted the enfranchisement of the subordinated classes but they could not foresee the actual lines of development. Down to the last, Mirabeau remained a royalist. Even Danton had monarchical inclinations, and was not, to begin with, an advocate of a republic. Arthur Young, whose 'Travels in France' were made just before and during the first movements of the Revolution, wrote that every one was in a mood of expectation. He had talked with all and sundry, and the impression he derived from these conversations was the existence of a universal belief that something important was about to happen, but that there was no definite conception as to its nature."

"In the days when you yourself wrote books, had you the contented feeling of the creator, or were you merely animated with the resignation of the writer and with the hope of being able to act at some future date?"

## ACTION AND REFLECTION

"Why do you speak of resignation?" he asked, struck by the term.

"To begin with, I was discontented with being no more than a writer. It took me a long time to become reconciled with this passive rôle and to be able to console myself with the thought of Byron, whose poems some one spoke of as undelivered parliamentary speeches."

He nodded his understanding and replied, "True enough, but the remark does not apply to young people. In youth, to write is a sort of mental training, whereby the pupil learns to contemplate things in their manifoldedness. This is true even when what is written subsequently encounters resistance in the world of reality, either because it is unpractical or because it is premature. At eighteen, every one writes verses. In early youth, we are phrase slaves. For a young man, a phrase is like a pretty woman with whom he falls in love. At forty, one faces up to the facts of life."

"What do you think of the books you wrote in youth?"

"The History of the Cardinals' is fustian. It was written with a political bias and intended for publication as a newspaper *feuilleton*. Political propaganda!"

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

"It is clear to me that the poetical side of your nature has continued to influence you in your career of action, persisting as a sort of analysis of your ego. During the decisive days of October, 1922, you describe how the echo of the Royal Guards resounded through the deserted streets of Milan."

With an eager gesture of assent, he said, "I have always been aware of such a twofold strain of feeling and I turn it to account in self-examination."

"Perhaps," I rejoined, "at different times you take divergent views of your own actions? When Napoleon was First Consul, he said that he had risen to power owing to the incompetence of the Directory and that his only object had been to restore order. But when he had become Emperor, he gave a very different explanation."

"Of course," answered Mussolini. "When one has reached a new position, one looks back upon the road from a different angle." Then, with a shade of rancour, he remarked, "For my part, certainly, it was not my sole aim to establish order!"

"In that respect you differ from one who is purely a poet. D'Annunzio, in an avowal which was exclusively poetical, told me that his only reason for going to Fiume was in order to act."

"You cannot regard that as a political standard,"

## ACTION AND REFLECTION

said the Duce. "Politics, after all, are a means and not an end."

"Nevertheless," I insisted, "in your early days you wrote more than once: 'The upshot of the battle is but a secondary matter. The struggle is its own reward, even if one should be defeated.' That is the language of the poet's fine frenzy, the speech of youth. Do you no longer believe it?"

Mussolini, who had punctuated my words with nods of assent, now set his jaw, as if determined not to allow himself to be robbed of the ideals of his youth, and said:

"Unquestionably I still believe it, heartily! You touch the core of the Fascist philosophy. When, recently, a Finnish thinker asked me to expound to him the significance of Fascism in a single sentence, I wrote: 'Life must not be taken easily!'"

"I am right, then, in thinking that you regard your actions symbolically?"

"That is a matter of the form in which life shapes itself. In the absence of symbolism, it would be a casual matter, undifferentiated."

"You would, then, approve one of Napoleon's farewell sayings: 'What a ballad my life has been!'"

"Splendid!"

"Do you think that now, after such multifarious

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

experiences, you could describe men better were you once more to take up your pen?"

"Much better!" he replied emphatically. "But you, how would you classify human beings?"

"Under two heads," I answered; "as active and reflective."

He drew his chair up close to the table, laid his arms on it, and said with a touch of irony, "I classify them primarily into those whom I like and those whom I dislike. On that point I form my opinions promptly, by a study of their faces. But there are numerous other categories: for instance, the optimists, whom I further divide into a number of subclasses. Then there are the people with fine sympathies, those who grasp reality with a vigorous understanding that reminds one of the eagerness with which a bee sucks honey from a flower. But there are others who have to be crushed by truth before they can begin to understand it. I have experienced as much myself. That is one of the ways in which one comes to master reality."

Such decisive utterances often come from Mussolini as an afterthought. At these times he looks at his auditor fixedly, smiles, and seems to be asking whether all the enigmas of the universe have now been solved. Purposely ignoring the hint of mock-



## ACTION AND REFLECTION

ery in his deméanour, I resumed with the utmost seriousness:

"But have you learned exclusively in the school of hard facts? We were talking just now of the might of poesy. When, in your box at the theatre, you watch Mark Antony or Cæsar on the stage, is it with an indifferent smile or are you studying them with profit?"

Turning half round in his chair, Mussolini picked an open volume from the top of a pile of books lying on a table behind him.

"I have just been reading 'Julius Cæsar'," he said, pointing to a French translation of Shakespeare and fluttering the leaves. "A great school for rulers! As I read before you came in, I was thinking how during his last days even Cæsar became a phrase-slave!"

"Are you referring to the historical Cæsar or to Shakespeare's?"

"I am afraid to the historical Cæsar also," he said thoughtfully. "Why did he not look at the list of the conspirators when it was thrust into his hand? Maybe he allowed himself to be killed, feeling that he had reached the end of the tether. Anyhow, I listen attentively at the theatre and draw comparisons with myself at this table. The fundamental

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

problems of power have always been the same; how one rules and how one rules with the minimum of friction."

"Do you take Cæsar as an exemplar?"

"Not altogether," he answered, closing the volume and thrusting it aside. "But the virtues of classical Rome, the doings of the Romans of old, are always in my mind. They are a heritage which I try to turn to good account. The matter I have to shape is still the same; and outside there is still Rome."

He waved a hand towards the window, through whose greenish windowpanes the lamplight from the Piazza made its way into the room.

## PRIDE AND ACTION

"IT is plain enough to me that pride is one of your fundamental character traits. But what is pride?"

"Self-awareness," answered Mussolini.

"*'Stolz'* in German, like 'pride' in English, has two conflicting senses, a good one and a bad. The English speak of 'proper pride,' but at the other end of the scale the word shades off into 'arrogance.' What does the Italian term '*alterigia*' mean?"

"'Arrogance,'" he answered; "pride of the wrong sort."

"I have never been able to understand," said I, "how a man of exceptional capacity can be proud of anything which he has not won by his own powers; how, for instance, he can be proud of his descent. Are you proud because in the thirteenth century your ancestors in Bologna had a coat of arms — a fact which some one has dug up out of the archives?"

His expression was disdainful as he rejoined: "Not the least in the world! The only one of my fore-

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

fathers in whom I am interested is a certain Mussolini who lived in Venice, killed his wife because she had been unfaithful, and then, before he fled from the city, laid two Venetian *scudi* on her bosom, to pay for her burial. Such is the character of the people of the Romagna whence I spring. All their folk songs are concerned with love tragedies."

"I am glad," I said, "that you have not yet become a duke or anything of that sort. No doubt it is quite untrue that you have designed yourself a coat of arms?"

"All nonsense!" (He spoke in English.)

"Of what incident in your career are you proud?"

"That I was a good soldier," he replied unhesitatingly. "I mean by this that I showed fortitude and energy. Only when possessed of those qualities can a man stand gun fire."

"In childhood," I went on, "your pride must have been sorely wounded at times."

"It was bitter in the mouth," he answered. "At school we youngsters were fed in three detachments. I always had to sit in the lowest grade, amongst the poorest. It no longer troubles me to recall that there were ants in the bread given to the children of the third grade but the mere fact that we were thus graded at all still rankles."

## PRIDE AND ACTION

"Yet your sorrows had a productive reaction!"

"Unquestionably! Such intolerable and unwarranted degradations make one who suffers them a revolutionist."

"If such feelings of humiliation are to become nation-wide," I said, "only he should voice them who takes over responsibility. During a speech in the Senate, in the year 1923 or 1924, you spoke feelingly about the matter, while accepting entire responsibility. What you said reads like — but you will not believe me."

"Reads like — what?"

"Like a speech of Lassalle's when he was defending himself in court. Moreover, like Lassalle, you quoted Heraclitus."

"I admire Lassalle," said Mussolini. "He was a man of first-class intelligence and endowed with far more imagination than Marx. That was why his vision of the days to come was far less catastrophic than that of Marx. Moreover, the final disaster, the duel in which he lost his life because of his passion for the beautiful Helene von Dönnige, was but another proof of the vividness of his imagination."

"He is discredited for the Russians, nowadays, since new documents have come to light showing his relations with Bismarck. I dealt with that matter

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

of Bismarck and Lassalle a good while back in a drama that was played on the German boards. But let me return to the matter of pride. I have been told that at the age of twenty you were arrested by the police in Zurich and subjected to anthropometrical examination."

"In Berne."

"Is it true that you were so angry that you exclaimed in a fury: 'The day of vengeance will come!' "

"Yes, it is true," he replied. "This contumelious treatment struck sledge-hammer blows which were more useful to me than my adversaries supposed!"

"Another anecdote I have heard relating to that period was that when an Italian made you a present of five lire you gave him an Arabian knife in return."

"Yes," he said, "that happened in Yverdon — a jackknife as long as this." (He indicated the length on his forearm.) "I should have hated the man if he had not accepted my gift in return for his money."

"Among the many tales told of you, that one pleases me best," said I. "All the more do I find it hard to understand your theories or your feelings

## PRIDE AND ACTION

when you transfer your personal honour to a community and when you speak of patriotism as a virtue."

He looked at me with surprise and inquired, "Why shouldn't I?"

"Because it is the cheapest of phrases, one with which any one can deck himself out. Samuel Johnson, the savage-tongued Englishman, said that patriotism was the last refuge of a scoundrel."

"You, assuredly, should not forget that every nation has a history. All the people that have a history have an honour peculiar to themselves. It is their heritage from their forefathers which justifies their existence. A nation that has produced Shakespeare, Goethe, or Pascal, one which has given Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, to the world, has risen above the level of a nomadic tribe. For me, the honour of the nations consists in the contribution they have severally made to human civilization."

"But do you think, then," I asked, "that this honour of which you speak ought to be defended by force of arms? Because Goethe, a citizen of the world, who loathed war, enriched the human race, is it needful that a million of young men should be destroyed by poison gas?"

"Not all affronts are equally gross," he rejoined.

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

"Besides, a great deal depends upon who utters an insult — a journalist or a responsible statesman."

"You consider, apparently, that I am to regard as a virtue this primitive feeling, love of country, which is as natural as one's love for one's parents?"

"To begin with," answered Mussolini, "patriotism is no more than a feeling. Sacrifice makes it a virtue. The virtue is greater in proportion to the magnitude of the sacrifice."

"But the danger is," I countered, "that each nation tends, when feeling grows hot, to make a parade of its 'honour.' The world suffered the consequences in the case of German national arrogance, which had been artificially stimulated for a generation, until Europe in general lost its temper."

"That was Germany's own affair," said Mussolini, drawing a line on the table with his finger. "If national feeling had become inflated among the Germans, here in Italy, on the other hand, there was too little of it. I have never spoken of the Italians as the salt of the earth but have merely insisted that we need as much light and space as other nations."

"But suppose that, one fine day, the people, from excess of enthusiasm, take the bit between their teeth?"

He paused before answering, looked at me criti-



## PRIDE AND ACTION

cally, and then said, "That depends upon the authority of the leader."

"Three years ago you created much alarm in Europe by a succession of bellicose speeches."

"We had been greatly irritated. It was necessary for me to find out how far the nation would follow me in case of need. What you heard elsewhere in Europe was but the echo."

"There were counter-echoes as well," said I. "It was greatly to Briand's credit that he made no answer! Even two years after the events, when I spoke to him about those weeks, he was still greatly troubled in mind."

Mussolini pays keen attention when he hears something new to him. One notices that he is storing the phrases in his memory. Now, without turning a hair, he said:

"Briand was not one of Italy's enemies."

"Such impetuousness," said I, "with which you have at times alarmed Europe, contrasts strongly with the forbearance I have noticed in you on other occasions."

Perceiving that I wished to steer the conversation off the rocks, he changed his tone and attitude, saying:

"Thirty years ago, when I was a schoolmaster, I

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

gave out as subject for an essay: 'Slow and steady wins the race.' This pleased my chief. At about the same date I wrote my first newspaper article (no, it was my second), and it was entitled: 'The Virtue of Patience.' The need for patience had already become plain to me. In truth, it is my way to prepare things long in advance. We are still in the beginning of April and I am already preparing my speech for the October festival."

"But there are occasions when no preparation is possible. For instance, the Corfu affair."

"The two techniques interlock. Patience and preparation, swift execution. The March on Rome could not have succeeded had it not been swift. When all the world believed that there would be trouble in Rome or in Florence, disturbances broke out in Pisa. That October evening, to hoodwink the world, I went to the theatre in Milan. They were playing Molnar's 'The Swan.' My proclamation had been ready since the 16th. I had given it to Chiavolini, for I regarded him as the most reticent of my associates. If the police had raided my house, I should have been arrested."

"Why do you speak of your enterprise as unexampled in history?"

"In Italian history," he amended. "If you want

## PRIDE AND ACTION

to find a precedent for mobilising Italy in order to march on Rome, you must go back centuries.”

“Suppose that one of your four generals, who, after all, had sworn fealty to the King, had changed his mind and opposed your march, what would you have done?”

“We should have fought!”

“What if you had failed?”

“We had made no plans for the event of failure. It was impossible. How could I have acted if I had not regarded failure as impossible?”

The two last answers were abrupt, incisive, hostile — the hostility being directed, not against me, but against a sceptical world which seemed to voice itself in my question. He spoke like a general who is rejuvenated by the memory of his most signal victory. I chose my next question swiftly, wishing to hear the same tone once more.

“But previously, during the year of disappointment in which you were defeated in the elections, did it never enter your head that the whole affair might collapse?”

“Never!” he exclaimed, as crisply as before. At such moments one seems near to understanding the tone and attitude of the man of indomitable will and also the intimate reasons for his success. Turn-

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

ing over in my mind the oft-discussed problem of character and circumstances, I said:

"To my own thinking, you have let circumstances drive you forward but never allowed them to hinder you. In my studies of history, I have only found this matter decisive in so far as it determines a trend in youth. If Bismarck or Cavour had sprung from the people, they would have hoisted the red flag with the same fervour as yourself."

"Character and circumstances interact on each other. Neither can be fully effective without the other. Furthermore, good fortune favours the efficient."

"If you have always enjoyed this self-confidence, let me ask you what, pragmatically speaking, you have learned during these ten years of rule."

He looked me full in the face, almost gratefully as it seemed — an unusual expression with him. The fact is that, though Mussolini for the most part prefers to let his thoughts go unwatched, there are rare moments when (like all lonely thinkers) he delights in the luxury of being fully understood. After a short silence he resumed:

"During the decade you speak of," he said, "I have developed. It has become ever more plain to me that action is of primary importance. This even

## PRIDE AND ACTION

when it is a blunder. Negativism, quietism, motionlessness, is a curse. I advocate movement. I am a wanderer."

"But in these wanderings of yours, is your movement undulating, now up, now down, then up again?" I asked. "Or is it, rather, like the ascent of one of the Alps, when a wider and ever wider prospect opens to the climber?"

"Yes," he said, "that is it. Climbing an Alp!"



## ART

"TO my mind," said Mussolini, "architecture is the greatest of all the arts, for it is an epitome of all the others."

"Extremely Roman," I interjected.

"I, likewise, am Roman above all. Greeks have only attracted me as far as philosophy is concerned — or, perhaps, I should add drama as well. I have always been very much influenced by the drama. In my youth I was extremely fond of Schiller's 'Wilhelm Tell' and wrote upon the subject. Of course I tried my hand at writing plays myself but none of them were finished. I began a play which was to be called 'The Unlit Lamp.' It was to be a social drama *à la* Zola, describing the fate of an impoverished blind child. In another of my attempts, 'The Struggle of the Motors,' a manufacturing secret was stolen and, through the instrumentality of this motif, the struggle of labour against capital was to be symbolised."

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

"Are you sorry or are you glad that these plays of yours were never finished?"

"Substantially they were writings for the arrangement and the development of my own ideas. The sketching of them was much more important to me than the getting them finished and produced."

"Nowadays, it would seem, you make sketches of plays for others to elaborate."

"You are referring to the Napoleon drama? Let me tell you how that came about. Having read your 'Napoleon,' I sent for Faranzo and said to him, 'If no one has as yet made the proceedings at the Champ de Mai in the spring of 1815 the theme of a play, a great chance has been missed.' Thereupon I drafted a scenario. After reading a book on Cavour, I did the same thing in the case of the tragedy of Villafranca. The general view has been that this drama keeps too close to history to be regarded as imaginative writing."

"I know the play," said I. "When, ten years ago, my Bismarck play was staged in Germany, I was torn to pieces by the critics, but the drama had a run of more than a thousand nights, for the public was eager to learn. Apropos, I am surprised you have not made more use of the cinema for propaganda pur-



## ART

poses. The Fascist film which has been shown abroad is a worthless affair."

"The Russians set us a good example there," answered Mussolini. "Soon we shall have more money to spare for the cinemas. To-day the film is the strongest available weapon."

Turning to the question of literature I said, "I am told that thirty years ago you were studying German literature."

"For practice in German I read Klopstock's 'Messias.' It was the most tedious work I ever struck!"

"Why on earth did you choose 'Messias,' which since Klopstock's days, no German has ever read from beginning to end?"

"Oh, that was not the only mistake I made," he replied with a smile. "Influenced by Gomperz, I drafted a book on philosophy. All these early attempts have been committed to the flames, though I was rather too precipitate in burning a monograph upon the origins of Christianity, which I think may have been pretty good."

"We have better writers in Germany than Gomperz and Klopstock! Have you read much of Goethe?"

"Not very much; but what I have read of his, I have studied thoroughly. Above all 'Faust' — both

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

parts. Heine, too, of whom I am extremely fond; and Platen, on whom I have written. Among D'Annunzio's plays, the two I like best are 'La figlia del Joris' and 'La Fiacola sotto il moggio.' I am a great admirer of Shaw, but sometimes find his freakishness annoying. Pirandello writes Fascist plays without meaning to do so! He shows that the world is what we wish to make it, that it is our creation."

"You still read a great deal, then? Do you make notes on what you read?"

"I read all sorts of things," he said. "Often I make a note when I come across something good."

From a drawer in the great writing table he took out a diary bound in red leather and showed me his daily record, sometimes half a page and sometimes a page. He had, so he told me, begun to write this in Rome nearly ten years before. Turning the pages of the manuscript volume, he read me some of the entries from recent weeks:

"Finished the book on Robespierre and the Terror. . . . Finished Poincaré's book on Verdun. He criticises the Italians [there followed notes concerning the behaviour of some of the Italian regiments]. . . . Began a book upon Napoleon as journalist. . . . Delighted with the Hungarian march in Berlioz' 'Faust'. . . . It is an error to suppose that

## ART

deflation is a cause of the crisis, for it is only a consequence. The cause of the crisis is the hoarding of money. The capitalists are to blame for this, not the government. . . . Briand is dead. . . . He was not hostile to Italy. His death took place at the time when official France wanted to annul his policy of an understanding with us. Thus he outlived that policy by a year. A talented man, full of ideas, but Poincaré is right in regarding him as a *bobémien*. . . . Read Siegfried's book upon the crisis in England. On page 195 he says that England is like a ship anchored in European waters but always ready to sail away. . . . The Bank of St. George, founded in Genoa about 1200 A.D., was the first joint-stock company in the world."

When he had closed the diary and laid it aside, I returned to the question of his chief models in literature and asked him whether he had read much Dante.

"Again and again; always, in fact. He was the first writer to give me a vision of greatness; and at the same time he showed me the heights to which poetry can attain." By a sudden transition, turning to more practical matters, he said genially, "I feel myself akin to Dante, owing to his partisanship, his irreconcilability. He would not even forgive his enemies when he met them in hell!"

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

There was the familiar forward thrust of his obstinate jaw, and he seemed to be thinking of certain personal experiences.

"You remind me of Bismarck," I remarked. "He once said, 'I didn't get a wink of sleep all night. I was hating all the time!'"

Mussolini grinned and I went on, waving my hand towards the window that gave on the Piazza, "But down below there, once upon a time, was another Roman who actually forgot the names of his enemies!"

"Julius Cæsar," said Mussolini, in the thrilling tones I had heard him use more than once when uttering this name. "The greatest man that ever lived. They wanted to bring him the head of his enemy Pompey, but Cæsar gave Pompey an imposing funeral. Yes, I have a tremendous admiration for Cæsar. But still," he went on grimly, "I myself belong rather to the class of the Bismarcks."

To divert him from this rancorous mood, I proceeded to quote what Bismarck had once said about music — a notable utterance. Music, declared the great Prussian statesman, aroused in him feelings of two different kinds: sometimes bellicose, sometimes idyllic.

"Same here," he answered.

## ART

"Do you still play the violin?" I inquired.

"Not for the last two years. At first it is refreshing but after a while it induces nervous exhaustion. If I play for half an hour, it soothes me, but in an hour I get excited and tired. It's like a poisonous drug, which may be useful in very small doses and is deadly in large ones. Friends and admirers have given me some very fine violins, but I have passed them on to young fellows who have talent and no money."

"To a man of strong will," said I, "Wagner is a poison and not even an agreeable one. I would venture to wager that you are an admirer of Beethoven."

"I can't stand 'Parsifal'; but I am fond of the third act of 'Tristan'; and also of the earlier, more melodious works of Wagner — 'Tannhäuser' and 'Lohengrin.' For us moderns, Beethoven still remains the greatest of all composers, especially as author of the Sixth Symphony, the Ninth Symphony, and the last of his quartettes. Still, Palestrina and his school are more congenial to me, although they are not in the same street with Beethoven."

"Certainly no German would agree with you about Palestrina," I said. "How do you account for the fact that the most supra-national, the most un-

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

material of all the arts, should nevertheless have nationalist affiliations?"

"What could be more natural?" he rejoined. "If you were to put me in a darkened room where I could hear music being played close at hand, I would wager my ability to distinguish between German, French, Italian, and Russian music. The language of music is international but its essential nature is purely national. Music seems to me the profoundest means of expression for any race of man. This applies to executants as well as to composers. If we Italians play Verdi better than do Frenchmen or Germans, it is because we have Verdi in our blood. You should hear how Toscanini, the greatest conductor in the world to-day, interprets him."

"The very mention of the man is an argument against what you have just been saying," I replied — "at any rate, as far as the executants are concerned. You could not find any German to conduct Beethoven so well as this remarkable Italian; and yet I have heard Verdi better produced in Germany than anywhere in Italy. Nietzsche, moreover, Nietzsche whom the pan-Germans pervert into a Blond Beast, understood 'Carmen' better than any Frenchman; and Wagner, the least German of all

## ART

our great composers, has to-day a far greater vogue abroad than within the German frontiers."

"You are only right in respect of exceptions," said Mussolini. "Really Wagner did not write Teutonic music. Nietzsche, again, who was of Polish extraction, was utterly un-German, was continually making fun of Prussia and the new empire, became professor of classical literature in Basle, and was a devotee of the culture of the Latin races. But, let me repeat, both these men were exceptions. Speaking generally, you are mistaken."

"It seems to me," said I, "that a nation has to pay for remarkable musical endowments. I regard the Germans as the most musical nation in the world and also as the least competent of all in political matters; whereas the British, who have so much less music in their souls, are the most distinguished for political talent."

He regarded me with a satirical smile, but would not take up the twofold challenge, except in so far as to say, with courteous dissent:

"I have my doubts as to both your superlatives."

It was time to break new ground, so I asked him:

"Since you have been a penman (writing both serious studies and works of imagination), and since

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

you have practised the art of music, do you think you might return to either or both of these fields if, by some turn of events, leisure were forced on you once more?"

He shook his head, saying, "I should never go back to the contemplative life. I am a western of the westerns. Like your own Faust I say, not 'In the beginning was the word,' but 'In the beginning was the deed!'"

(He quoted Faust in German: "*Im Anfang war die Tat!*")

Wishing to pin him to an authoritative utterance, I ventured to ask once more:

"Do you, in truth, never feel any desire to rest from your present labours?"

"No," he answered decisively, with a look which put a seal on the utterance.



## LONELINESS AND DESTINY

IN my study of great careers," I began, "I have always made it my business to note in one particular respect the behaviour of men who have left the circle in which they grew up — how they have comported themselves as between their relationship to their old friends, on the one hand, and the loneliness which their new position has forced upon them, on the other. Herein there is disclosed the character — or part of it. What does the man do in such a conflict between human kindness and authority? Does he not naturally tend to pass from the tropics to the North Pole? Tell me what happens when one of your old comrades enters this hall! How do you make shift without reopening one of the old discussions? You once wrote (and it is a fine saying): 'We are strong because we have no friends.'"

Mussolini made no movement, no gesture, as he sat opposite me; but there was something unusual, something almost childlike in his expression which disclosed to me that the topic I had mooted had

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

stirred him profoundly. When at length he answered, it was plain to me that his words were colder than his feelings and that he was not disclosing all his sentiments or all his thoughts.

"I cannot have any friends. I have no friends. First of all, because of my temperament; secondly, because of my view of human beings. That is why I avoid both intimacy and discussion. If an old friend comes to see me, the interview is distressing to us both and does not last long. Only from a distance do I follow the careers of my former comrades."

"What happens when those who have been friends become foes and when such a one calumniates you?" I asked, remembering my personal experiences. "Which among your old friends have remained most faithful to you? Are there any former friends whose onslaughts are still a distress to you?"

He remained unmoved.

"If those who were once my friends have become my enemies, what concerns me to know is whether they are my enemies in public life; if so, I fight them. Otherwise, they do not interest me. When some former collaborators attacked me in the press, declaring that I had embezzled money intended for Fiume, this certainly intensified my misanthropy. The most

## LONELINESS AND DESTINY

loyal of my friends are enshrined in my heart but in general they keep their distance. Precisely because they are loyal! They are persons who do not seek profit or advancement and only on rare occasions do they visit me here — just for a moment.”

“Would you trust your life to these or to any one else?” I asked. “You have made some of them life members of the Gran Consiglio.”

“Three, and only for three years,” he said drily.

“Such being now your position, I am led to ask when you felt yourself most lonely. Was it in youth, as in D’Annunzio’s case; or when you were outwardly in close contact with your party comrades; or to-day?”

“To-day,” he answered without a moment’s hesitation. “But still,” he went on, after a pause, “even in earlier times no one exerted any influence upon me. Fundamentally I have always been alone. Besides, to-day, though not in prison, I am all the more a prisoner.”

“How can you say that?” I inquired with considerable heat. “No one in the world has less ground for making the statement!”

“Why?” he asked, his attention riveted by my excitement.

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

"Because there is no one in the world who can act more freely than you!" I rejoined.

He made a conciliatory gesture and replied:

"Please don't think that I am inclined to quarrel with my fate. Still, to a degree I stand by what I said just now. Contact with ordinary human affairs, an impromptu life amid the crowd — to me, in my position, these things are forbidden."

"You have only to go out for a walk!"

"I should have to wear a mask," he answered. "Once when — unmasked — I made my way along the Via Tritone, I was speedily surrounded by a mob of three hundred persons, so that I could not advance a step. Still, I do not find my solitude irksome."

"If loneliness is agreeable to you," said I, "how do you find it possible to put up with the multitude of faces you have to look at here day after day?"

"In this way," he replied; "I merely see in them what they say to me. I do not let them come into contact with my inmost being. I am no more moved by them than by this table and these papers that lie on it. Among them all, I preserve my loneliness untouched."

"In that case," said I, "are you not afraid of losing your mental balance? Do you not recall how the





## LONELINESS AND DESTINY

reigning Cæsar would, while enjoying a triumph in the Forum, have with him in his chariot a slave whose business it was to remind him continually of the nullity of all things?"

"Of course I remember. The young fellow had to keep the emperor in mind of the fact that he was a man and not a god. But nowadays that sort of thing is needless. For my part, at any rate, I have never had any inclination to fancy myself a god but have always been keenly aware that I am a mortal man, with all the weaknesses and passions proper to mortality."

He spoke with obvious emotion and then went on in a calmer tone:

"You are perpetually hinting at the danger that may result from the lack of an opposition. This danger would be actual if we lived in quiet times. But to-day the opposition is embodied in the problems that have to be solved, in the moral and economic problems that perpetually press for solution. These suffice to prevent a ruler from going to sleep! Furthermore, I create an opposition within myself!"

"I seem to be listening to Lord Byron," said I.

"I often read both Byron and Leopardi. Then, when I have had enough of human beings, I go for

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

a voyage. If I could do whatever I liked, I should always be at sea. When that is impossible, I content myself with animals. Their mental life approximates that of man and yet they don't want to get anything out of him: horses, dogs, and my favourite, the cat. Or else I watch wild animals. They embody the elemental forces of nature!"

This avowal seemed to me so misanthropical that I asked Mussolini whether he thought a ruler needed to be inspired with contempt for mankind rather than with kindly feelings.

"On the contrary," he said with emphasis. "One needs ninety-nine per cent. of kindliness and only one per cent. of contempt."

The statement, from him, surprised me, and to make sure that I was not misunderstanding him, I asked him once more: "You really think, then, that your fellow human beings deserve sympathy rather than contempt?"

He regarded me with the inscrutable expression which is so common to him and said softly:

"More sympathy, more compassion; much more compassion."

This utterance reminded me that, when reading Mussolini's speeches, I had more than once been surprised by what seemed to me a parade of altruism.



## LONELINESS AND DESTINY

Why should he, the *condottiere*, refer with so much insistence to the interests of the community? I was led to ask him:

"Again and again, in exceedingly well-turned phrases, you have declared an increase of your own personality to be your aim in life, saying, 'I want to make my existence a masterpiece,' or, 'I want to make my life dramatically effective.' Sometimes you have quoted Nietzsche's motto, 'Live dangerously!' How, then, can a man with so proud a nature write: 'My chief aim is to promote the public interest?'" Is there not a contradiction here?"

He was unmoved.

"I see no contradiction," he replied. "It is perfectly logical. The interest of the community is a dramatic affair. By serving it, therefore, I multiply my own life."

I was taken aback and could find no effective repartee, but I quoted to him his own words: "'I have always had an altruistic outlook on life!'"

"Unquestionably," said he. "No one can cut himself adrift from mankind. There you have something concrete — the humanity of the race from whose loins I sprang."

"The Latin race," I interrupted; "that includes the French."

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

"I have already declared, in the course of one of these conversations, that there is no such thing as a pure race! The belief that there is, is an illusion of the mind, a feeling. But does it exist any the less for that?"

"If so," said I, "a man could choose a race for himself."

"Certainly."

"Well, I have chosen the Mediterranean, and here I have a formidable ally in Nietzsche."

The name aroused an association in his mind and, speaking in German, he quoted the proudest of Nietzsche's utterances: "Do I seem to strive for happiness? I strive on behalf of my work!"

I pointed out that this idea really derived from Goethe and I asked him whether he shared Goethe's notion that character is moulded by the blows of fate.

He nodded assent: "It is to the crises I have had to pass through and to the difficulties I have had to surmount that I owe what I am. Because of that, one must always stake one's all."

"Therewith you run the risk of destroying yourself and your work by taking needless risks."

"Life has its price," he answered confidently.

## LONELINESS AND DESTINY

"You cannot live without risk. This very day I went into battle once more."

"If you were consistent in that view, you would not seek to protect yourself," I said.

"I don't," he rejoined.

"What!" I exclaimed. "Do you not recognise that again and again some one of your enemies risks his own life in the hope of depriving you of yours?"

"Oh, I understand what you are driving at. I know, too, the rumours that are current. It is said that I am watched over by a thousand policemen and that every night I sleep in some new place. Yet in actual fact, I sleep night after night in the Villa Torlonia and I drive or ride whenever and whithersoever fancy seizes me. If I were to be continually thinking of my own safety, I should feel humiliated."

"Tell me," I said in conclusion, "what part does the desire for fame play in your life? Is not that desire for fame the strongest motive for a ruler? Is not fame the only way of escaping death? Has not fame been your goal since you were a boy? Has not all your work been animated by the desire for fame?"

Mussolini was imperturbable.

"Fame did not loom before me in boyhood," he

## TALKS WITH MUSSOLINI

said; "and I do not agree with you that the desire for fame is the strongest of motives. In this respect you are right, that it is some consolation to feel that one will not wholly die. Never has my work been exclusively guided by the wish for fame. Immortality is the hall mark of fame." He made a sweeping gesture towards a remote and uncontrollable future, adding, "But that comes — afterwards."

END





